

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 220.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 20, 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

THROUGH THICK AND THIN;

OR, OUR BOYS ABROAD

By HOWARD AUSTIN.



The two fiends in human form rowed away, leaving Tom and Mike, bound hand and foot, to be choked to death slowly, as the raft upon which they stood fell with the tide.

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CHAPTER I.

THE CRY OF MURDER.

It was a dreary night.

Thick, murky clouds hung like a funeral pall over the city of New York.

A slow, steady rain was falling, through which dimly shone the lamps, throwing a fitful glare over the wet, gleaming pavements of the deserted streets.

The occupants of Mr. Augustus Mortimer's residence on Fifth Avenue had long since retired to their rooms, and the house was as silent as the grave.

The clocks had scarcely ceased striking the midnight hour when a door on one of the upper floors was noiselessly opened.

A young man of about nineteen years of age, with keen, foxy-looking eyes and heavy under-jaw, thrust out his head and listened intently.

After several minutes had elapsed he fastened a black crape mask over his face, stepped into the hallway and stole softly down the stairs.

Feeling his way along the balusters and walls, for it was dark as Erebus, until he reached the door of a room on the first floor at the back of the house, he paused, held his breath, and listened.

Nothing broke the profound silence except the faintly heard ticking of a clock.

The masked man inserted a pair of outsiders, or hollow nippers in the key-hole, grasped the end of the key, unlocked the door and pushed it open.

Putting his head into the chamber the man fixed his eyes on a bed, where, by the dim light of the gas, which was turned down, the form of Mr. Mortimer, who was slumbering soundly, was discernible.

Drawing a key from his pocket the masked man moved cau-

tiously across the room, knelt before a safe, which stood in a recess, and unlocked it.

The bolt, as it shot back, made a sharp, clicking noise, the sleeper stirred uneasily, and the robber cowered on the floor, scarcely daring to breathe.

But Mr. Mortimer, after turning on his side, lay still, and his regular breathing indicated that he slept soundly.

The masked man pulled open the door of the safe and eagerly commenced to examine its contents.

"Ha!" he muttered, under his breath, as he seized a roll of greenbacks and thrust it into his pocket, "here are some of the stamps, but not half of them, I am sure."

Package after package was taken out, merely glanced at and laid on the floor until at length a parcel done up in brown paper was found, which on being opened proved to be a large amount in bank notes.

"Ah!" chuckled the robber, "I have them at last!"

"And, villain, I have you!" exclaimed Mr. Mortimer, who, awakened by the rustling of the papers, had slipped out of bed, crept up behind the robber and seized him by the shoulder.

Uttering a startled exclamation the masked man dropped the package, sprang to his feet, turned, caught Mr. Mortimer by the throat, drew a long, keen dagger, and hissed:

"Breathe but a whisper and I'll cut your heart out!"

Striking the robber a quick blow in the face, Mr. Mortimer wrenched himself loose, sprang to the burner, turned on the gas and shouted:

"Murder—murder—murder!"

For a moment the robber seemed uncertain whether to fly or renew the attack, when his mask, which had been loosened by the blow he received, fell off.

This incident, simple as it was in itself, seemed to completely paralyze the robber and Mr. Mortimer.

They both stood motionless as statues, with their eyes fixed on each other's faces.

The countenance of the robber expressed fear and desperation—the desperation of a trapped wolf—while a look of horrified surprise swept over Mr. Mortimer's face.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Saul Harris, wretched boy, would you murder your benefactor?"

There was an ominous gleam in Saul's eyes as he ground his teeth together, and muttered:

"I did not mean to harm you, but you have brought it on yourself."

Saying which he sprang on Mr. Mortimer, forced him back against the wall and struck full at his breast with the dagger.

The imperiled man, twisting himself to one side, avoided the blow, the dagger struck against the wainscot and was shivered to pieces.

But Saul was not to be thus balked of his purpose; he locked his fingers around Mr. Mortimer's throat and endeavored to throttle him.

In vain Mr. Mortimer tried to cry out or tear loose from the grasp which was choking the life out of him.

Saul's long fingers gripped and kneaded into the throat of the helpless man, and he pressed his hands against it until the muscles stood out like whipcords from the knuckles.

Not for an instant was the deadly grip relaxed, but the sinewy hands clutched the throat still more fiercely at each abortive throe.

Mr. Mortimer gasped for breath, his face grew livid, his tongue protruded, and his eyes started out from their sockets.

The awful struggle went on almost in silence, for no sound was heard save the labored breathing of Saul, and smothered moans of intense agony from Mr. Mortimer.

Saul had almost accomplished his hellish purpose, for Mr. Mortimer was at his last gasp, when a lithe, active-looking youth of about eighteen years of age, with bold, clear-cut features and bright, hazel eyes, stepped into the room.

He realized the situation at a glance; with one bound he reached the would-be murderer, seized him by the collar, jerked him loose from his victim and threw him to one side so violently that coming in contact with a table it was overturned and he fell over it.

Mr. Mortimer, on being released, sank in a senseless heap on the floor.

Saul Harris gathered himself up slowly and stood upon his feet; his face was distorted by pain and rage; his eyes gleamed with immeasurable hatred, and he looked the very incarnation of murder.

"So," he growled, hoarsely, "you have crossed my path again, Tom Gale, but I'll wipe out old scores now, if I swing for it!"

And suiting the action to the word he whipped out a revolver, leveled it at the head of Tom, who was only a few feet distant, and pulled the trigger.

Quick as lightning Tom knocked up the muzzle of the pistol; the ball passed over his head; he closed with Saul, wrenched the weapon from his hand and hurled him crashing against the wall.

The shock, though severe, did not take the fight out of Saul. Nerved by desperation and bitter hatred, he ran his hand into his coat-pocket, grasped a slung-shot and drew himself together, half crouching, like a savage animal about to spring.

But Tom covered him with the pistol and said:

"If you don't want your brains scattered over the wall you had better keep still."

Though naturally cruel and ferocious, and by no means without animal courage, Saul Harris quailed before the prospect of certain death; he remained motionless, glaring around him in impotent rage.

Without taking his eye off of the baffled villain, Tom knelt by Mr. Mortimer, felt his heart and found that it was beating steadily but faintly.

At that moment a partly dressed, half awake servant, who

had been aroused by the report of the pistol, made his appearance.

Cutting short the man's exclamations of astonishment, Tom ordered him to assist in placing Mr. Mortimer on the bed and then run for a doctor.

When Tom stooped to help raise the insensible man from the floor, Saul made a quick step to one side, reached an open window, swung himself out, dropped to the ground, ran to the back of the yard, scaled the fence, fled across a vacant lot and disappeared in the darkness.

Tom saw Saul jump out of the window, but made no attempt to stop him, and muttered to himself:

"It is best so."

Mr. Mortimer had regained consciousness when the doctor arrived, who examined him, announced that his injuries were not dangerous, administered a composing draught and departed.

"You saved my life, Tom," said Mr. Mortimer, when they were left alone, "and I'll not forget it."

"I am glad I arrived in time, sir."

"I was so near gone that when you pulled the rascal away I fainted. How did you happen to come? Did you hear me halloo?"

"I had been asleep some time when I awakened suddenly, with the impression on my mind that some one had cried murder; not knowing whether it was a dream or not, I came downstairs to see if there was anything wrong going on."

"What became of Saul Harris?"

"He made his escape; I thought it best to let him go, but determined that if you were seriously injured to hunt him down if it took me a lifetime to do it."

"You did right, my boy. Thank God that things are no worse!" replied Mr. Mortimer, and immediately fell asleep.

Tom replaced the package of money and papers, locked the safe, and stretched himself on a sofa, intending to keep watch during the remainder of the night.

But strong excitement knocks a man up almost as much as hard work, and he insensibly dropped into a doze.

From which he started wide awake, and saw Mr. Mortimer standing in the middle of the floor, with his eyes wide open, but evidently sound asleep.

Knowing that it was dangerous to awaken a somnambulist suddenly, Tom was uncertain what to do.

Mr. Mortimer rubbed one hand over another and exclaimed in a horror-struck tone.

"Blood—blood! Will these stains never come out? Hark! some one is coming; quick, I must wash my hands or all is lost!"

Whereupon he walked to a stationary wash-basin, turned on the water and put his hands under the stream.

The cold fluid coming in contact with his hands awakened him; he gave a start, turned around, saw Tom and said:

"Halloo! I must have been walking in my sleep. Did I say anything?"

"You said something about washing your hands," stammered Tom, who was so astonished that he scarcely knew what he was saying.

"Ah!" said Mr. Mortimer, with a sigh of relief. "Never mention this circumstance, Tom; people might talk, you know, and I do not wish to be thought odd."

Thereupon he lay down and was soon asleep again.

Mr. Mortimer had the reputation of being one of the most honorable and high-toned men in the city, and the words which he uttered while talking in his sleep, indicating that at some time he had committed a horrible crime, so astounded Tom that he could think of nothing else.

While he was wondering about this matter his attention was attracted by a slight noise in the back yard.

Wishing to see what caused the sound Tom picked up the

revolver and walked toward the window; as he approached it a man's head slowly arose above the still.

Startled, but undismayed, Tom presented his pistol and said: "Who are you? Speak quick or you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER II.

AN ESCAPE AND A VILLAINOUS PLOT.

Tom Gale and Saul Harris were cousins, and nephews of Mr. Mortimer, a rich old bachelor, who five years prior to the time at which this story commences, took the two boys to live with him, intending to educate and give them a start in life.

Tom was a high-spirited, manly fellow, devoted to and excelling in all kinds of athletic sports; his love of fun was constantly getting him into some kind of a scrape, but he usually came out right side up, and he never went back on a friend or avoided an enemy.

Saul Harris was of an entirely different character. Under a sanctimonious demeanor, he concealed a crafty, avaricious and cruel disposition.

Such was his consummate hypocrisy, that until—tempted by the knowledge that there was an unusually large sum of money in the house—he tried to rob and afterward to murder his uncle, the latter never suspected his true character.

Tom Gale, who had several times thwarted Saul's rascally schemes and thereby incurred his undying hatred, understood him better, but did not dream of the depth of his depravity.

For he was a double-dyed villain, in league with rogues and desperadoes, and familiar with their haunts.

When Saul reached the street after escaping from his uncle's house he ran smack into the arms of a policeman, who collared him and asked:

"What are you running for?"

"I'm going after a doctor," replied Saul, struggling to release himself.

"Keep quiet or I'll club you!" said the officer. "Who fired that pistol?"

"It went off accidentally and my uncle is hurt. I wish you would not stop me."

"Who is your uncle?"

"Mr. Mortimer."

"What were you doing in this vacant lot?"

"I came out of the back door and across the lot; it is the nearest way."

"That's a little too thin."

"It is the truth."

"I don't see it; I'll stay with you until you get a doctor, and then see you home."

"Very good; but you need not choke me to death."

"I'll let loose your collar, but don't you try any little game on me, it won't work."

"Oh, you need not be afraid of my trying to run away," replied Saul, who, however, immediately set his wits to work to devise some way to get rid of his unwelcome companion.

"Here is a doctor's office," said the officer, after they had walked about a block.

"I wish to get Dr. Thompson," replied Saul, who, in order to gain time for reflection, mentioned a physician living on Thirty-fourth Street, some eight or ten squares away.

"Well, push ahead, then. You don't seem to be in such a big hurry as you were; your uncle cannot be much hurt," remarked the officer, suspiciously.

"No; he is only slightly wounded in the hand," answered Saul, quickening his pace.

Rendered almost frantic by the idea of being arrested, Saul determined to make a desperate attempt to secure his liberty.

On reaching Dr. Thompson's residence he went to the door, fumbled about a little while and then said:

"I can't ring the bell; I wish you would try it, you are stronger than I am," then moving to one side he stealthily drew his slung-shot.

The policeman stepped up to the door, and as he placed his hand on the bell-pull Saul struck him a furious blow on the back of the head with the slung-shot and knocked him down.

Then springing out on the sidewalk Saul took to his heels, and, owing to the darkness, was almost instantly out of sight.

But for his hat, which deadened the force of the blow, the policeman's skull would have been fractured; as it was, he was only partly stunned.

Staggering to his feet he drew his revolver and commenced firing in the direction where he heard the footfalls of the fugitive.

The report of the pistol was heard by a roundsman, who rapped on the pavement with his club, and ran toward the sound of the firing.

In order to escape the bullets and avoid coming in contact with the approaching officers, Saul dodged under a truck that stood by the sidewalk, crept out on the other side, crossed the street on his tip-toes without being discovered, and continued his flight in the same noiseless manner.

The policeman who was struck, being too much dazed to recognize the roundsman's voice when he hailed, continued to shoot; supposing that he had some desperado to deal with the officer drew his pistol and returned the fire.

Thanks to the darkness, neither of them was hit, and after emptying their revolvers they managed to make themselves known to each other.

After holding a consultation, as it was evidently useless to try and find Saul, the two policemen determined to investigate affairs at Mr. Mortimer's.

On arriving at his residence, seeing a light streaming from the open window, they cautiously scaled the fence, found a step-ladder in the yard, and the roundsman, ascending to reconnoitre, found himself confronted by the yawning muzzle of Tom Gale's pistol, as related at the conclusion of the last chapter.

The officer lost no time in explaining who he was and the object of his visit.

Tom told him that a doctor had already visited Mr. Mortimer, but under the pretence of not wishing to disturb his slumbers, declined to enter into any explanation of what had happened; so the policemen retired but little wiser than they were when they came.

After getting away from the policeman, Saul hurried along, glancing back over his shoulders from time to time, and listening to ascertain if he was followed.

There was no sound of pursuit, and after traversing several blocks he breathed freer, but did not slacken his pace until he was on the east side of the city below Grand Street.

He was now in one of the worst quarters of New York, a perfect nursery and stronghold of squalor, poverty, debauchery and crime, but he seemed to be familiar with his surroundings.

Striking into a narrow street which ran toward the river, he pursued his course with many windings and turnings until he paused in front of a tumble-down rookery.

Upon the front of the building was a sign bearing the half-effaced inscription, "The Home Harbor," announcing that it was a house of entertainment.

First glancing around to see that there was no policeman in sight, Saul descended four or five rickety steps and entered a large room with a low ceiling.

The place was a rum shop of the lowest description, filthy in the extreme, and pervaded by a damp, mouldy feeling, and fetid, offensive odor.

Late as it was, several rough, dirty men and slatternly, brazen-faced women were seated on stools at small tables, eating, drinking or smoking.

A man with fiery red face, thickly spotted with rum blossoms, and who had the close-cropped, bullet head of a prize-fighter, sat behind the counter.

Merely nodding to this forbidding-looking person, and receiving in return an abortive attempt at a wink, Saul pushed open a door to the left of the counter and passed through a room littered with rubbish of all kinds, into a long, narrow corridor.

Proceeding to the end of this he turned abruptly to the right into a recess or alcove, about eight feet deep, and struck on the wall at the further end of it in a peculiar manner.

The wall instantly sank into the floor, leaving an opening through which Saul stepped, and the wall immediately resumed its former position.

Saul now found himself in a plainly furnished room, confronted by a keen-eyed man, who greeted him with:

"Halloo, my kid! What's the racket?"

"Nothing particular," replied Saul. "I wish to see Juan Ortega."

"I'll send him down," answered the man, leaving the room.

On being left alone Saul drew out the roll of greenbacks he had secured and rapidly counted them; they amounted to something over twenty-three hundred dollars, principally in one hundred dollar bills.

The house that Saul was now in was a hiding place for the most notorious and desperate criminals in New York; its numerous entrances and exits were concealed so artfully that its character had never been discovered by the police.

In a few minutes the man Saul inquired for entered the room.

He was a dark, swarthy man, with huge chest, slightly bowed legs, blue-black hair and whiskers. In character he was crafty, cruel and savage. He had been a pirate, and latterly a robber and burglar.

He and Saul Harris met like old acquaintances; entering a private room, the door of which Ortega locked, they were soon engaged in an earnest conversation, which was carried on in whispers, for they both believed that "walls have ears."

After briefly recounting what had happened at the Mortimer mansion, and his encounter with the policeman, Saul continued:

"I secured a little over two thousand dollars, but left more than four times that amount behind; I had the bundle of notes in my hand, but dropped it when the old man caught hold of my shoulder; however, I would have soon disposed of him and brought it off if that scoundrel, Tom Gale, had not interfered."

"What do you intend to do?" asked Ortega.

"I'll have to leave the city, but before I go I mean to get even with Tom Gale, and I want your assistance."

"Want him beaten?"

"No," replied Saul, grinding his teeth, "I want him killed!"

"Whew!" whistled Ortega, "you are down on him!"

"I have good cause to be down on him; furthermore, if he lives he will keep me out of a large fortune."

"How?"

"The will of my grandfather, from whom my uncle inherited his fortune, prohibits him from bequeathing the property to any one outside of the family; he is too old to marry. Tom Gale and myself are his only relatives. After what has occurred to-night my uncle will be disposed to leave every dollar to Tom; but if he's out of the way nothing can prevent me from getting the property."

"Then I advise you to put Mr. Thomas Gale out of the way at once. What will you give me to help do the job?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"For a thousand I'll assist you to settle this matter, then take you where you'll be safe from arrest, and make enough money to live like a prince until your old uncle kicks the bucket."

"Explain yourself."

"Day after to-morrow I sail as first mate of the Harpy, a swift, heavily armed vessel, with a crew of a hundred dare-devils. We need a little money to finish settling the ship's bills; give me the thousand dollars and you shall go with us as supercargo, and share in the enterprise."

"Where are you going, and what do you propose to do?"

"Our destination and object will be kept secret till we are in blue water; but if you knew everything, you would jump at the chance."

It looked like taking a leap in the dark, but Saul believed that Ortega possessed the virtue of truthfulness, if no other, so after a moment's hesitation he said:

"I'll accept your offer."

"All right," answered Ortega; "now what is the best way to get at Tom Gale? We have no time to lose."

"He is captain of a baseball club, which is preparing to play some match game day after to-morrow; they will be practicing near the bay shore, just below Fort Hamilton."

"Then we will have plain sailing; disguise yourself, hire some roughs, take them down to the ball ground, kick up a muss, and while it is going on, put a bullet in Tom Gale."

"But how will I get away? I may be captured."

"Never fear. I'll be on hand when you bring your man down. I'll step up, throw open my coat, display a detective's shield, take you into custody, and bring you to a place of safety."

"What if I fail?"

"Then I'll arrest both of you, hurrying you down to where some of our crew will be waiting with a boat, and carry you off to the Harpy. She is lying in the lower bay. Once on board we can do what we please with Tom Gale; and before the authorities get wind of the matter we will be out at sea."

After some further discussion the plan was agreed to. Saul took a room and the two villains retired to rest.

CHAPTER III.

A DIABOLICAL DEED.

The next morning Mr. Mortimer, with the exception of a little soreness about the throat, was none the worse for the murderous assault that was made on him.

Wishing to keep the occurrence out of the papers, and being constantly annoyed by reporters who had got wind of the affair, he went down to his cottage at Long Branch.

Tom Gale stayed at home, as the Red Cross Baseball Club, of which he was captain, was engaged to play several games during the week.

The next day, as Tom was hurrying down to the boat to join his club, who were going to Fort Hamilton, he was met on the street by Mike Malone, one of the members of the club, and his firmest friend.

Mike was a stout, active, red-headed Irish boy, about nineteen years old. He was shrewd, full of fun, and pluck to the back-bone.

"Halloo, Tom," he said, "I've been waitin' for yer."

"What's up, Mike?" asked Tom.

"The devil would 'ave been to pay, an' no pitch hot, but for a blessed accidint."

"What do you mean?"

"Sure an' I wint into a saloon to light me cigar, an' who should be there but Bill Smith an' a dozen of his bla'guards

pourin' down the whisky, though it's sildom they've a cint to bless themsilves with, an' a braggin' that they wor goin' to ther fort an' clane out ther Red Crosses."

"The mischief! I wish I had known of this a little sooner."

"It's all right, my boy; I jist spoke to siven or eight of me frien's of the O. K. Club—hard hitters iv'ry one of thim—an' sure they are goin' down with us."

Sure enough, when Tom and Mike got to the ferry-house they found the other members of the Red Cross nine amicably conversing with Mike's friends, who were a hearty, rough-and-ready looking set of boys.

A boat was in the slip, and in a few minutes the party were on their way to Fort Hamilton.

Before reaching their destination it was agreed that Mike's friends should avoid the appearance of being with the Red Cross Club, but keep close enough to them to take a hand if a fight was commenced.

When the Red Crosses got off of the boat they were met by the Hackmatacks, a nine that had agreed to meet and practice with them.

The two clubs at once moved off to the ball ground, followed by Mike's friends; and Saul Harris, disguised by a big, false beard, accompanied by Bill Smith and his gang of roughs.

Tom won the toss, sent the Hackmatacks to the bat, and the game commenced.

Much to Saul's disgust, Ortega, who had insisted upon having the thousand dollars that morning, was not on the ground.

Afraid to make a move without him, Saul walked down toward the bay shore to look for Ortega, after cautioning Bill Smith not to create any disturbance during his absence.

But there was great animosity existing between Bill Smith's gang and Mike's friends, and the two crowds hardly ever met without having a difficulty.

So Saul had not been gone but a few minutes before the roughs, who were well primed with liquor, and much the strongest in numbers, made a furious onslaught on their old enemies.

Mike's boys fought bravely, but were clearly overmatched. The Red Crosses, however, were wide awake; they sailed in with their bats and put a different face on the affair, and "heads" on Bill Smith's gang in the twinkling of an eye.

Saul, who had discovered Ortega approaching, seeing the fight going on, clapped his hand on his pistol, ready to use it at a moment's warning, and ran toward the crowd.

Before he reached it, however, his hired roughs took to their heels, and he was met by Mike Malone, who, regarding him as one of the gang, gave him a clip across the face with a bat and knocked him down.

Scrambling to his feet, Saul hurried back to meet Ortega; as for the roughs, they were so badly demoralized that they started for New York.

Bidding two men who accompanied him remain where they were, Ortega turned aside with Saul into a thicket that skirted the ball ground.

The precipitancy of the roughs completely upset the plan of the two villains, for the idea of arresting Tom Gale under the circumstances was too absurd to be entertained, even by a bogus detective.

Or at least so averred Ortega, who had all along been determined to make Saul shoulder as much of the risk and responsibility as possible.

"I'll tell you what it is," said the wily rascal, "the best plan is for you to pick a quarrel with Tom Gale, yourself, and shoot him."

"That won't work," replied Saul, wiping away the blood that flowed from his nose; "before I could say a word to him the crowd would beat me half to death with their bats; they saw me with Smith's gang."

"Then you will have to hang around until you get a chance to pop him. I'll be on hand with my men and bring you off safe."

"But you promised to arrest him if I failed."

"So I will, but there must be some shooting or fighting while I am present, to furnish a pretext for doing so."

Saul did not fancy the part he had to play at all, but he determined to go ahead rather than throw away the thousand dollars which he had paid out.

Concealing himself in the thicket he waited for an opportunity to carry out his murderous design.

Finally the game of ball was ended, the Red Crosses beating the Hackmatacks by a score of seven to three.

Then after a short rest some of the members of the two clubs began to amuse themselves by pitching and throwing the ball about.

Some one happening to throw a ball high in the air, Tom Gale and several others ran together in a bunch to secure it.

The group, when they paused with uplifted hands to catch the descending ball, were not more than ten steps from Saul.

This was the very chance that he had waited for; leveling his pistol at Tom's head Saul pulled the trigger.

There was a flash and a report, and down Tom went.

But he was not hurt, though he escaped very narrowly, for the ball cut through his hair, just grazing his skin. Startled by the suddenness of the affair he tripped on a pebble and fell.

As he touched the ground his hand came in contact with a bat; seizing it he leaped to his feet and dashed into the thicket, followed by the other boys.

Saul had put up his pistol and turned to fly; finding himself closely pressed he again drew his weapon, but before he could use it, with a stroke of his bat, Tom sent it flying into the bushes and dealt the villain a crashing blow on the head, which sent him down like a shot.

At this moment Ortega came running up and yelling out: "I am a detective, and clubs are trumps!" aimed a furious blow at Tom's head with a bludgeon.

"But bats are better!" shouted Mike, parrying the blow and striking Ortega a swinging blow on the side of the head, sent him to grass.

Ortega's two men now came running up, armed with sticks, and displaying policemen's shields on their breasts.

None of the boys wished to have a conflict with officers, so they cried to Tom and Mike, the only ones who had struck a blow, to run for it.

The two boys needed no second bidding, but were off like deers.

Ortega, who was used to hard knocks, was on his feet in an instant, and with his two men started in pursuit.

Saul, who was afraid of being left to the tender mercies of the other boys, staggered to his feet and labored along in the rear.

Away they went, helter-skelter, Tom and Mike gradually drawing away from their pursuers.

Unfortunately they ran toward the bay shore, and as they approached four sailors, who were loitering about a ship's boat, Ortega shouted:

"Stop those boys!"

Whereupon the sailors threw themselves on Tom and Mike, who, after a fierce struggle, were overpowered.

As soon as Ortega came up they were securely bound and gagged, placed in the boat, carried out to the Harpy, which was near at hand, hoisted on board, thrust into the fore-castle, and the door fastened on the outside.

A short time afterwards Captain Butler, commander of the Harpy, came on board. The ship was at once got under way, dropped down to Sandy Hook, where she was becalmed and came to anchor in nine fathoms of water.

About an hour before sunset, Ortega and Saul, who were

both in a savage humor, for their heads were badly swollen and very painful, were pacing the deck together.

At some distance from the ship there was standing in the edge of the water an upright beam, with a transverse piece at the top. It was all that remained of the tide-gauge which formerly stood there.

Saul pointed to it, and said:

"I would go away satisfied if Tom Gale was hanging to that post."

"Not a bad idea," growled Ortega; "to-night we will take the two kids off in the dingy and truss them up, one at each end of the cross-piece."

In the meantime Tom and Mike, suffering terribly from the tightness with which they were bound, and unable to exchange a word, were lying on the floor in the forecastle, wondering what was to be done with them.

A little after dark some sailors came into the forecastle, seized Tom and Mike by their collars, dragged them on deck and tumbled them into a boat alongside, in which Ortega and Saul were already seated, who at once rowed away.

Ortega was too shrewd a villain not to prefer pulling, himself, to letting any of the crew witness the deed which he was about to commit.

"Get back as quick as you can!" shouted the captain. "We are hove short, and the wind is rising."

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied Ortega, bending to the oars, while Saul steered.

In a few minutes the beam loomed up between them and the dim light of the sky.

On reaching it they found a small raft, probably belonging to some fisherman, moored to the upright post, so that it could rise and fall with the tide.

The boat was made fast to the raft and Tom and Mike dragged out on it.

Two small, strong ropes were taken from the boat, nooses quickly made on one end of each and slipped over Tom's and Mike's heads.

Then seizing the ends of the ropes Ortega threw them over the cross-piece at the top of the post, so that they hung down within reach.

If the hearts of Tom and Mike quailed—and well they might, when the Angel of Death was hovering just over their heads—their faces did not show it. Unable to speak, they bid each other a mute farewell with their eyes.

Taking hold of the end of the rope that was noosed around Tom's neck, Ortega said:

"Clap on here and let us run him up!"

"Hold!" cried Saul. "You said it was high water, did you not?"

"Yes."

"How high does the tide rise?"

"There is a new moon to-night, and it is a spring-tide, which rises five feet at Sandy Hook."

"Then instead of pulling them up let us tie the ends of the ropes and leave them to die leisurely."

"Better finish the job at once. What is the use of leaving anything to chance?"

"There is no risk, and I want Tom Gale to die a lingering death. If he had a hundred lives they would not satisfy my vengeance."

"Just as you please, then; it is your funeral," replied Ortega, who proceeded to firmly knot the ends to the bights of the ropes about two feet above the heads of Tom and Mike.

"Everything ship-shape, now," he said, when he had finished the job; "let us be off. I have allowed them a little slack, so that they will have time to say their prayers."

The two cold-blooded villains stepped into the boat and Ortega, seizing the oars, shoved off.

Giving way to his vindictive feelings, Saul pulled off the

whiskers, which up to this time had disguised him, and looking Tom Gale in the face, said, with a devilish chuckle:

"Ha! ha! Tom Gale, now I leave you to die—to die a dog's death and by inches!"

And the two fiends in human form rowed away, leaving Tom and Mike, bound hand and foot and gagged, with halters around their necks, to be choked to death, slowly, as the raft upon which they stood fell with the tide.

CHAPTER IV.

SAVED—THE VAMPIRE OF THE OCEAN.

When Saul and Ortega returned to the Harpy the anchor was weighed, the sails set and the vessel stood out to sea.

A more desperate condition than that in which Tom and Mike were left, can scarcely be imagined.

They were perfectly helpless, unable to either cry out for help or do anything whatever to avoid the death that stared them in the face.

And such a death! They would, as Saul said, literally die by inches—yet if a blood-stained murderer, who expiates his crime on the gallows, fails to have his neck broken by the drop, and struggles a few minutes, the whole country rings with the barbarity of the execution.

Situated as they were, Tom and Mike thought the sudden death would be a priceless boon.

Yet when the tide commenced going out and the raft drifted against the upright beam with a shock that came near throwing them from their feet, the instinct of self-preservation made them use every effort possible to avoid the catastrophe, and keep the grim monster at bay.

When the water fell sufficiently to let the raft down low enough to pull the halters taut, and drew the nooses tight around the necks of Tom and Mike, they began to suffer horribly.

As the raft rose and fell with the waves the two boys were alternately choked, and allowed a moment for imperfect respiration.

Oh, the agony of those interminable intervals, between breath and breath!

Only those who have had to remain passive, while their lives trembled as it were in a balance, can form an idea of the immeasurable expansion of time, when its progress is marked by the shadow of death.

Tom and Mike endured the tortures of the rack—the thrilling apprehensions of those who bare their necks to the headsman's axe, long drawn out, and intensified a hundred fold.

Shuddering, choking, gasping for breath, with their hair standing upright on their heads, their eyes starting out of their sockets, their hands clutched, their limbs paralyzed and a cold sweat oozing out of every pore of their bodies they stood every moment expecting the death which seemed to play with them, as a cat plays with a mouse.

But all things must have an end.

Lower and lower fell the tide.

Tighter and tighter the ropes were drawn.

Until at length the raft arose on a wave, fell with it, and went so low that Tom and Mike were left dangling in mid-air at the ends of the halters.

But it was only for a moment that they hung suspended.

The nails which held the transverse of timber, rusted by long years of exposure to the moist sea air, were not strong enough to support the additional weight thrown on them, and they broke.

The heavy cross-piece fell, struck upon the rotten rope which fastened the raft to the upright beam, and broke it in two.

Tom and Mike fell headlong in an insensible condition on the raft, which, released from its fastenings, drifted away in the darkness toward the open sea.

During the night the raft was carried by the tide outside of Sandy Hook.

And it was nearly sundown, the day after their miraculous escape from death by hanging, before Tom and Mike were rescued from their perilous position on the raft by the crew of the ship Clinton, of New York.

During all this time the two boys had remained in a half-stupefied condition, and it was some hours after they were picked up before they recovered sufficiently to converse intelligibly.

After hearing their story Captain Parker, the skipper of the Clinton, informed them that the Clinton was bound to Calcutta, India, and that just before she sailed two of the owner's sons, who had been shipped as apprentices, deserted, leaving their kits on board.

In conclusion Captain Parker said:

"I can probably put you two young men on a homeward-bound vessel, but I am a little short-handed and would like to have you take the places of the deserters, and make the trip with me."

"Sure, an' ther cap'n's been the manes of savin' our lives," said Mike, "an' we'll go to ther ind of ther woruld with him, won't we, Tom?"

"Certainly," replied Tom, "if he wants us; we can write home by some ship or other, and let our friends know where we are."

So the matter was settled.

The kits of the two deserters, and the second cabin, which had been fitted up for their accommodation, were turned over to Tom and Mike, who at once proceeded to examine the contents of the chests, and found an abundance of nice clothing, which fitted them almost as well as if it had been made for them.

"Be jabbers, but this is bully!" said Mike, dancing a hornpipe after they had dressed themselves in natty suits of sailor's clothes.

"You are right," replied Tom, singing:

"A life on the ocean wave,
And a home on the rolling deep."

"I say, Tom, an' phat was the raison that Saul Harris, who, barrin' he is yer cousin, is a bla'g'ard, was afther killin' us?"

"Oh, he hates me because he thinks I stand in his way, and he and his companions did not think it safe to let you go when you knew where I had been carried."

"Ther cowl'd-blooded vill'in! But I'll be afther gettin' aven with him."

"And so will I."

"Then we'll stick to each other on that."

"Yes, and everything else."

"Shake!"

And they shook hands.

Tom and Mike were not put on duty until next day, when, with the exception of a little stiffness, they felt as well as ever.

Captain Parker, finding them to be intelligent and gentlemanly, treated them very kindly, and as they never shirked their work and were civil and obliging, they soon became popular with the crew.

The voyage to India, or at least to the Bay of Bengal, was uneventful.

When the vessel approached the mouth of the river Hoogly, up which it is necessary to sail to reach Calcutta, the wind was baffling, and Captain Parker determined to wait until

next day before attempting to pass the much-dreaded sand-heads that surround the entrance of the river.

The Clinton was accordingly brought to anchor off the island of Sangor, on which the unfortunate Munro had his head taken off by a tiger, many years ago.

The island abounds in game, and Captain Parker had the cutter lowered, took Tom and Mike and a man to mind the boat, and started toward the shore, intending to do a little hunting.

The whole party were armed with repeating rifles and the captain, Tom and Mike each carried a revolver.

As they were rowing along a huge creature with enormous bat-like wings or fins, measuring twenty odd feet from tip to tip, reared a portion of its body out of the water, close to the boat, and then plunged down with a splash.

"The devil!" ejaculated Mike.

"Not quite," replied the captain, springing up and seizing a three-pronged harpoon, attached to a small coil of rope, the other end of which was fastened to the bow of the boat, "but it is a devil-fish, or vampire of the ocean."

He had scarcely ceased speaking when the devil-fish arose again only a few feet distant.

Up went the captain's arm, the harpoon whistled through the air and the barbed points were buried deep in the back of the monster.

The next instant Captain Parker measured his length on the bottom of the boat, which shot forward almost from under his feet.

On feeling the harpoon the devil-fish darted off like lightning, dragging the boat after him.

Away dashed the frightened monster with the boat, around which the water hissed and foamed, tearing along in his wake.

"He cannot keep on at this rate long without coming to the top of the water," said Captain Parker, "and then we can settle him with the rifles."

But the devil-fish showed no signs of tiring; it continued its flight with unabated speed, in a straight line, until it was within a few hundred yards of the mainland.

Then, after tacking about here and there among the low sand islands, it started toward the open sea.

This change of direction caused the boat, which was going at a high rate of speed, to strike upon a sand bar with such violence that the keel was deeply embedded in the yielding substance and stuck fast.

But this did not stop the devil-fish for an instant; it kept on its way, snapping the rope attached to the harpoon as if it had been packthread.

The moment the rope broke the devil-fish, as if exulting in its escape, threw itself out of the water high into the air.

Quick as a flash Tom's rifle was at his shoulder and poured forth its deadly contents.

Down plunged the devil-fish, but almost immediately reappeared on the surface of the sea with the blood gushing from a wound in its head.

Hither and thither dashed the stricken monster, dyeing the water with its blood and lashing the sea into foam with its powerful wings, until finally it turned on its back and with quivering fins and tail, sunk slowly out of sight.

"That was a quick shot and a good one," said the captain to Tom; "the ball pierced the devil-fish's brain or it would not have killed him."

The tide was falling and the boat was so fast aground that all hopes of getting it off until high water was abandoned.

In a short time the water fell so low that the captain and the two boys were able to reach the mainland almost dry-shod.

After crossing the beach they came to a dense growth of bamboo, above which, here and there, rose cocoanut and other tropical trees.

"This is the far-famed jungle of India," said Captain Parker;

"we must stay together and keep our wits about us, for we may encounter a tiger, snake or centipede at any moment."

They moved forward cautiously, forcing their way through the bamboos until they reached the edge of a comparatively open space, when they heard a deep, surly growl just in front of them.

The whole party stopped as suddenly as if they had been paralyzed by that dreadful sound.

"By heavens, it is a tiger!" said Captain Parker, cocking his rifle. "Stand firm, boys, and be ready to fire if he charges; it is our only chance—if we try to go back we are dead men."

CHAPTER V.

THE TIGER AT BAY—WRECK OF THE "CLINTON."

There is something inexpressibly startling in encountering the tiger, that blood-thirsty and terrible tyrant of the jungle, in his native wilds.

But Tom and Mike stood firm, with their fingers on the triggers of their rifles, ready to use them at a moment's notice.

A tiger, without it is a confirmed man-eater, will rarely ever attack a man in the daytime, except under peculiar circumstances, and Captain Parker was in hopes that the animal would sneak away.

But in this he was disappointed, for another growl was heard, followed by that switching of the tail which indicates a disposition to charge.

"He intends to fight," said the captain, in a low voice; "fire the instant you see him, and remember there is life or death in every shot."

A low, rustling sound was heard, as if the tiger was creeping through the tall grass to get near enough to make his fatal spring.

It was a moment of terrible suspense, and every one's nerves were strung up to the highest pitch.

Just as the rustling sound ceased Tom caught sight of the tiger as it crouched to spring; quick as lightning he raised his rifle and fired.

Uttering a roar, so terrific that the boldest trembled, the stricken monster sprang with a tremendous bound through the air, and fell at their feet, writhing in the agonies of death.

At the same instant a native who had lain concealed by the long grass only a few feet distant, and over whom the tiger had bounded, sprang to his feet, uttering startled exclamations of astonishment.

"Tom, you are a hero!" said Captain Parker, wringing his hand. "In all probability that shot saved our lives."

"Be jabbers, an' it was a narrow escape entirely!" said Mike.

"It is the man-eater," said the native, looking at the dying tiger. "May dogs defile his father's beard! He had crept close to me as I slept in the grass, and if the Sahibs had not come when they did, Abdallah would now be among the Houris."

It is always dangerous to approach a fallen tiger until he is dead, for they have frequently been known, when apparently expiring, to strike down and kill or maim men for life, with a blow of their tremendous paws.

Abdallah, who was a tall, athletic man, in the dress of a sikaree (hunter), picked up his long matchlock gun, and, firing it into the tiger's head, ended his struggles.

Then squatting on the ground he gravely proceeded to singe off the animal's whiskers with the lighted match.

"What in the mischief are you doing that for?" asked Tom.

"If I did not singe his whiskers the ghost of the tiger would come back and haunt those who have killed him."

"I don't care about his ghost," replied Tom, laughing, "but I will pay you to take off his skin for me."

"The sahib (gentleman) has saved Abdallah's life, and he wants no pay for serving him," answered the native, whipping out a keen, sharp-pointed knife, and proceeding to skin the tiger with great dexterity and expedition.

While thus engaged, he, in response to inquiries, stated that he was the chief of a tribe of Seedeers who had been nearly exterminated during the Sepoy rebellion.

Captain Parker explained to Tom and Mike that the Seedeers were a mild race, who inhabit the jungles of India, and that they were of African origin, being descendants of slaves who escaped from the early Portuguese settlers.

About the time that Abdallah finished skinning the tiger the heavens became overcast and the air became filled with the scent of newly wet earth, which is the sure precursor of a tempest in the tropics.

"We must make haste to the boat and get on board of the Clinton; there is going to be a storm," said Captain Parker, leading the way, followed by the two boys and Abdallah, who carried the tiger's skin.

A low, moaning sound was heard as they hurried along, but there was not a breath of air stirring.

Just as the party emerged from the jungle on to the beach there was a blinding flash of lightning, a deafening peal of thunder, and then the wind, howling like a legion of demons let loose, swept over the sea, lashing it into wild sheets of foam.

In an instant the cutter was overturned and swept away.

The sailor who was left in charge of it, however, had prudently come on shore.

But the loss of the boat was quickly forgotten in the contemplation of a much greater calamity.

The Clinton dragged her anchor, a violent gust of wind threw her on her beam ends, and she drifted away at the mercy of the wind and waves, and was lost sight of in the blinding storm.

"Poor fellows," said Captain Parker, "I am afraid it is all over with them; but I would give my right hand to be on board."

"I'm thinkin' it's a good deal betther to be on ther land about this time," remarked Mike.

"Oh, it is safer, of course, but a captain's place is on his ship, particularly when there is danger."

As there was nothing to be accomplished by remaining exposed to the tempest, the whole party accompanied Abdallah to his hut, which was near at hand.

After drying their clothes and making a hearty meal of bread, broiled venison and tropical fruits, they retired to rest on couches made of skins, and were soon sound asleep.

The storm ceased before morning, and as soon as it was light Captain Parker led the way to the beach and every one eagerly scanned the sea in hopes of seeing the Clinton.

But not a vestige of the ship could be discovered, and the supposition was that she had gone down with every soul on board.

Captain Parker at once determined to make his way to Calcutta, and Abdallah agreed to act as guide.

Calcutta is situated on the Hoogly River, about a hundred miles from the sea.

But persons traveling on land have to make a wide detour to avoid the impenetrable marshy jungles which extend for many miles along the banks of the river.

The rest of the day was spent in cooking provisions and getting ready for the long and arduous journey.

By nightfall everything was ready, and long before daylight the party took a hasty meal and started on their way through the gloomy forest.

For it is neither pleasant nor healthy to travel during the middle of the day in the torrid climate of India.

Abdallah led the way, carrying in his hand a flaming torch to scare away prowling animals and enable his companions to keep in the path.

The rest of the party followed in Indian file, the sailor bringing up the rear, leading a stout, short-legged pony, upon which was packed the provisions, cooking utensils and skins to sleep upon.

As they moved onward, from time to time a suspicious rustling in the grass, the howl of a gray monkey, or the unearthly wailing cry of the great horned owl, ending with a half-suppressed scream, as of a person being strangled, made every one, except Abdallah, grasp their guns tightly and stare around apprehensively.

But they were not molested by the savage denizens of the forest, and when the day broke with that suddenness peculiar to the tropics, the gloomy night was quickly forgotten in the pleasure of looking at the beautiful scenery and gorgeously-hued birds that darted about among the trees.

The blazing sun rose high in the heavens and the heat was becoming oppressive to the Americans, though their guide strode onward with an elastic, untiring step, when a herd of startled deer dashed across their path.

In an instant every gun was raised and a general volley fired.

A large stag, with a magnificent pair of antlers, plunged forward, and came down with a crash in the bushes.

Uttering a yell of triumph, Abdallah drew his knife and darted forward to dispatch him.

But the stag was merely stunned; he regained his legs before the guide reached him, and lowering his head rushed furiously upon the native.

On came the wounded stag, mad with rage and pain, his bloodshot eyes gleaming fiercely, and white foam flying from his mouth.

Standing motionless until the stag was within a few feet of him, Abdallah then sprang nimbly aside, avoided the shock and plunged his knife to the hilt in the side of the deer, which staggered onward a few yards and fell dead.

It was now determined to stop to eat dinner, and rest until the cool of the evening.

Abdallah proceeded to break up the deer, while the rest, laying aside their arms and ammunition, stretched themselves on the grass under the shade of an immense teak tree.

CHAPTER VI.

A HAIR-BREADTH ESCAPE—IN DEADLY PERIL.

While the preparations for dinner were going on, Tom, seeing the gleam of water through the trees a few hundred yards distant, unfastened a calabash from the pony's pack and started to get some of the refreshing fluid.

Passing along a narrow path, trodden down through the bushes and long grass by wild animals, he soon reached the low, shelving bank of a wide, shallow stream.

As he stooped to fill the calabash a huge crocodile thrust its black, scaly snout above the surface of the water only a few yards away and started toward him.

Tom had left his revolver and rifle under the teak tree, so he started back from the threatened danger and turned to fly; but had not proceeded a dozen paces when a crashing sound was heard, as if some heavy animal was forcing its way through the tangled brushwood, and an immense bison bull stepped into the path in front of him.

Tom stopped, dumfounded, for he knew that the Indian

bison was so fierce and vindictive that they were dreaded more by the native hunters than even the tiger.

On seeing Tom the bull commenced to paw the earth, lash his sides with his tail and bellow in a voice of thunder.

Glancing over his shoulder for a way to retreat, Tom saw the crocodile creeping stealthily out of the water toward him.

Hemmed in the narrow path by the impenetrable jungle on each side, a furious bison bull about to charge him in front, and the crocodile ready to rush on him behind, Tom gave himself up for lost.

But no time was left him to indulge in forebodings.

A scuffling noise gave warning that the crocodile was close to him, just as the bull, with his tail on end, and his malignant eye rolling savagely, charged him like a thunderbolt.

Tom instinctively made a frantic spring to one side, caught his foot in a vine and fell headlong in the dense thicket, just in time to escape the bison.

The bull, missing his victim, ran full tilt against the crocodile and attacked it furiously.

The crocodile being under great disadvantage on shore, and prevented from using its formidable tail by the narrowness of the path, backed toward the water, defending itself as best it could with its powerful jaws, which it kept snapping incessantly.

Goaded to a frenzy of madness by the pummeling it received, the scaly monster assumed the offensive as soon as it got into its native element, and the fight was continued with redoubled fury in the shallow water by the shore.

But Tom did not stay to see the result of the encounter; leaping to his feet he flew back toward his companions.

They had been alarmed for his safety by the bellowing of the bull, and were already on their way to succor him.

Breathless with excitement Tom told of his narrow escape.

He was anxious to attack the bison at once and was joined in the wish by Mike, Abdallah and the sailor.

But as there was no way of approaching the bull except by the narrow path, Captain Parker put his veto on attacking the powerful and ferocious animal, under the circumstances.

So the party returned to the teak tree and were soon engaged in discussing a bountiful meal of the juicy flesh of the stag, cooked in regular hunter's style.

The pony was cropping the rich herbage near by, having been turned loose to graze, with the skins designed for beds, and that of the tiger Tom killed, strapped on his back.

In the meantime the bison bull, after receiving various bites and blows from the crocodile, gored and mangled the scaly monster so severely that it sought safety in deep water.

If anything could have added to the rage of the bull the escape of the crocodile did so, for the bison is so implacable that it is not satisfied with merely killing an enemy, but mangles the body in the most shocking manner, and lingers about the spot for hours—nay, days, ever and anon trampling upon and goring the inanimate remains of its victim.

After seeking in vain for the crocodile the bull bellowed defiance and stalked off through the woods, eager to find something upon which to wreak his vengeance.

He had not gone far before he saw the pony, rushed at it with blind fury, struck it and sent the luckless animal flying heels over head as if it had been projected from a catapult.

Hearing the crash, every one sprang to their feet and grasped their guns.

A red flannel shirt which the sailor wore caught the bull's eye, and instead of goring the helpless pony he dashed toward the group of men.

A shower of rifle balls was poured into him, but did not check his speed for an instant.

Abdallah sprang to a small tree and climbed into the branches with the agility of a squirrel.

The rest of the party scattered and took refuge behind such large trees as stood near at hand.

Then there was a lively time.

The bull pursued the sailor around the tree behind which he had sheltered himself.

Captain Parker, Tom and Mike took advantage of the opportunity to discharge their rifles at the animal, which immediately dashed at the captain, who jumped behind his tree.

Then the sailor and the two boys fired at the bull, and he turned his attention to Tom.

In this way the bull kept charging first one and then another of the party, and receiving shot after shot, the only effect of which seemed to be to increase his fury; for the bison is so tenacious of life that if its heart or brain is not struck scarcely any number of wounds will disable or kill it immediately.

Knowing that his position was by no means a safe one, Abdallah prudently kept silent, until becoming excited he called out to the others to aim their shots just behind the bull's shoulders.

This attracted the bull's attention and he rushed like an avalanche against the small tree in which Abdallah was, felling it to the ground as if it had been struck by lightning.

Entangled among the branches, Abdallah was perfectly helpless.

With lowered head the bull dashed at him—in another moment he will be a mangled corpse.

But Mike, who is just beyond the helpless Abdallah, with the characteristic bravery of an Irishman, steps recklessly out in front of the charging bull and fires point blank at the forehead of the ferocious creature.

The ball flattens against the thick skull of the bull, merely bringing him to his knees, and he is on his feet again in an instant as dangerous as ever; but before he can make a single bound Tom sends a bullet through his heart.

The enormous brute plunges heavily forward, falls almost on top of Abdallah, with a shock that makes the earth tremble, utters a deep groan and expires.

"Hurrah—hurrah! he's dead—he's dead!" simultaneously shouted every one.

Abdallah extricated himself from the fallen tree, unhurt, but was so much moved that he could scarcely find words to express his gratitude to his preservers.

The assurance of his safety lifted a great weight off of the minds of the rest of the party, for they knew that without a guide it would be very difficult to make their way out of the jungle.

To the astonishment of every one, the pony, with the exception of a few bruises, was uninjured; its life was saved by the skins strapped on it, which prevented the bison's horns from penetrating.

This was a pleasant surprise, indeed; for the idea of packing the skins and provisions was anything but agreeable.

Toward evening the party, refreshed by the halt, continued their march.

The lengthening shadows of the trees warned them that it was time to prepare their camp for the night, when a sudden opening among the trees brought them to the edge of an open glade, some hundred yards in diameter, surrounded by teak and tamarind trees.

Under the shade of an immense banyan tree, near the bank of a clear stream that wound its way through the opening, were several tents.

Bullocks, baggage ponies, horses and a stately elephant were picketed near at hand.

Numerous Hindoos in picturesque costumes were moving about, or squatted on the ground.

In front of the tents three white men were lounging, chatting and smoking.

As Captain Parker and his companions stood looking at this unexpected but pleasant scene, numerous dark forms were seen flitting noiselessly through the trees.

Then a score of half naked savages, armed with spears, swords and knives dashed into the opening, uttering blood-curdling yells, and made a furious attack upon the people about the tents.

Taken completely by surprise, in less time than it takes to tell it, two of the white men were down, weltering in their blood, and five or six of the Hindoo attendants were butchered.

"Thugs!" yelled Abdallah, his dark eye flashing.

"Charge!" shouted Captain Parker.

There were only five against twenty, but no one cared for the odds.

Without a moment's hesitation the small party swept down on the others like a whirlwind.

Delivering a volley with their rifles, at such close range that every shot told, and five of the villains bit the dust, Captain Parker and the boys drew their revolvers and Abdallah his keen-edged sword.

The fight that followed was close and deadly; the crack of the revolvers was almost incessant, the sailor armed with a hatchet did valiant service, while Abdallah with his sword laid about him like a fiend incarnate.

Nor did their antagonists shun the encounter or give ground an inch; the Hindoo when aroused has no fear of death, and the Thugs are the bravest and most desperate of the race.

In a few seconds the sailor was down and Abdallah wounded.

The result of the encounter seemed to tremble as it were in a balance, when another band of some twenty-five savages burst from the woods and rushed toward the combatants, yelling and brandishing their weapons.

"Die fighting!" shouted Captain Parker. "Surrender means torture and death."

Tom and Mike never flinched, but Abdallah, uttering a wild, shrill yell, sprang away from the group as if to fly.

CHAPTER VII.

SLAUGHTER OF THE THUGS—THE BLACK FLAG.

The first impression of Tom and his friends was that Abdallah meant to desert them.

But to their astonishment Abdallah sprang toward the approaching savages, who gave a shout when they saw him, placed himself at their heads and fell upon the Thugs with the greatest fury.

He had recognized the advancing party as friends, and fearing that if he remained among the struggling combatants he might be mistaken for an enemy and cut down, sprang away from them so that he might be known.

The Thugs, up to the time they were attacked, thought the newcomers were friends; then finding that they were assailed by an overwhelming force of their most deadly enemies, endeavored to escape, but were cut down to a man.

No quarter was given, and the fight ended in a massacre, which Captain Parker and the two could not prevent.

It was, perhaps, best so, for Thugs practice murder as a sacred principle, and would regard it as meritorious to drive a dagger into the heart of a man who had just saved or spared their lives.

As soon as their enemies were disposed of, Captain Parker and the two boys examined the sailor and found that he had been felled by a blow which stunned but did not seriously injure him.

They then turned to look for those from they had risked their lives to succor.

Such of the Hindoo attendants as were not killed at the first onset of the Thugs, had fled to the forest for safety.

Two of the white men were covered with wounds, and quite dead; the other was leaning against a tree, completely exhausted by the almost superhuman exertions he had put forth to defend himself from several of the Thugs, who made a determined attempt to kill him while the fight was going on.

The rescued man, a keen-eyed, middle-aged, gentlemanly looking personage asked for water, and after drinking, thanked Captain Parker and the two boys for their timely aid, and inquired where they were from.

After being informed on these points, and of the occurrences which led to their opportune arrival, he said:

"I, like yourselves, am an American; my name is Clark; by profession I am a physician, but have spent most of my life in traveling and exploring.

"Intending to penetrate into the interior of Africa, I determined to take with me some tame elephants and a party of hunters from India.

"To procure these I came to Calcutta, where my vessel, the Falcon, now lies moored.

"Elephants and mahouts were readily procured in Calcutta, but I was informed that good, reliable hunters could only be found in the country; as I wished to see the men before engaging them, I came to look them up myself. Captain Bostock, commander of the Falcon, and my traveling companion, Mr. Russell, accompanied me; poor fellows, they are lying dead before you."

In conclusion, Dr. Clark said:

"Captain Parker, if your vessel is lost I will offer you the command of the Falcon, and if your gallant young friends wish for some adventures, and will join the expedition, I will try and make it both pleasant and profitable for them."

The captain, Tom and Mike thanked him, and the doctor suggested that, as it was too late to move the camp, some disposition be made of the corpses at once, for speedy burial of the dead is the safety of the living in India.

The little glade which a short time before looked so smiling and peaceful in the bright sunshine, now presented a ghastly spectacle.

Two white men and six of the Hindoo servants lay weltering in their blood near the tents, while here and there, just as they were killed by the first volley, fell fighting, or were overtaken and cut down in their retreat, were the bodies of twenty Thugs, contorted in every conceivable position by the agonies of death.

The Hindoo attendants who fled to the forest, having with some difficulty been recalled, they were set to digging graves. As soon as they completed their task the bodies of Captain Bostock, Mr. Russell and the attendants who were slain were committed to the earth.

As for the dead Thugs, the Seedeas threw them into the jungle, where the wild dogs, wolves and jackalls were heard all through the night, snarling and fighting as they tore the bodies to pieces and feasted on them.

When Abdallah found out that Dr. Clark wished to engage hunters, he at once offered to go with him to Africa, and said that he could procure all the men that were wanted.

He also stated that his father, previous to his capture and sale as a slave, was king of the Bechuana tribe known as the Bataw, which signifies "they of the lion," and that the tribe would be his firm friends if he went back to Africa.

Dr. Clark, knowing the Seedeas were the bravest and best hunters in India, engaged him at once and authorized him to employ twenty-five good men.

This Abdallah did in a few minutes. He made an impassioned speech to the men whose arrival at the critical moment decided the fight, and they agreed to accompany him.

With this arrangement Dr. Clark was very well pleased,

when he was informed that the party consisted of the best men in Abdallah's tribe, who were on a hostile expedition against the Thugs.

The day was now fast drawing to a close. A cool breeze sprang up, and at times the cry of wild creatures beginning to stir in the jungle was heard.

Firewood was collected, and other preparations made for the night.

Abdallah took occasion to inform Tom and Mike, privately, after binding them to secrecy, that his father had left a large treasure concealed in Africa, which he expected to recover, in which event he intended to make them both rich for having saved his life.

The short twilight of the tropics was followed by intense darkness; supper was eaten, a guard posted, with instructions to keep the fires going, and the rest of the party retired to rest.

Fatigued by the march and the exciting scenes they had gone through, Tom and Mike, who occupied a tent together, after a little conversation, half in jest, half in earnest, about the fortunes Abdallah proposed to give them, fell asleep and slumbered soundly, though the howl of the wolf, the sharp bark of the jackal and the sullen roar of the tiger rang out with startling distinctness near at hand.

At daylight the next morning the camp was astir, breakfast was eaten, tents struck, baggage packed, and the party started for Calcutta.

Captain Parker and the two boys were mounted on horses furnished by Doctor Clark.

Abdallah's luggage was placed on one of the bullocks, and he rode his pony; the rest of the natives walked.

In five days they reached Calcutta.

Captain Parker went to the office of the United States consul and ascertained that the Clinton was driven ashore and went to pieces during the storm, and all on board were lost.

Captain Parker at once notified Doctor Clark that he would accept the command of the Falcon.

The captain's determination decided Tom and Mike, who had more than half made up their minds to go with the doctor, anyway.

That afternoon Doctor Clark, Captain Parker and the two boys took a boat to go to the Falcon, which was lying in the upper part of Garden Reach.

"There she is!" cried the doctor, pointing to a vessel moored in the stream. "Is not she a beauty? She sits on the water like a duck."

The Falcon was indeed a handsome ship. She was clipper built, and the copper on her sharp bows and beautiful run shone like burnished gold.

They were soon on her flush and level deck, and found that she was heavily armed, carrying sixteen twenty-four pound carronades, eight of a side, four thirty-two pounders as bow and stern chasers, and a sixty-four pound rifled gun, mounted on a pivot amidships.

"Why, she is a regular war vessel!" said Captain Parker.

"She was built and armed for the 'Opium Trade with China,'" replied the doctor; "she sails like a witch, and, as you observe, has some teeth to show if fighting is necessary."

The crew, consisting of fifty fine, active-looking men, were mustered, informed of the death of Captain Bostock, and Captain Parker formally placed in command.

The vessel remained several days longer, during which Tom and Mike saw everything worthy of note in Calcutta, "The City of Palaces."

At length everything was on board, and the Falcon dropped down the Hoogly to the sea and sailed on the expedition which was to be so fraught with momentous incidents, productive of weal or woe to those engaged in it.

After a pleasant voyage, during every day of which Captain

Parker, who was formerly a captain in the United States navy, rigorously drilled the men at the guns and in handling the ship, the Falcon arrived at Cape Town and came to anchor in the harbor.

Here the ship remained three days, during which acclimated horses and various other things were purchased.

Everything having been stowed away, the anchor was weighed and the vessel started up the western coast of Africa.

About eight days afterward the Falcon was gliding along under easy sail in sight of land, when a man in the main-top sang out:

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?" asked Captain Parker, who was on the quarter-deck with Doctor Clark and Tom Gale.

"Broad on the weather-bow."

"What does she look like?"

"Can't rightly say, sir; she is too far off."

"Spears, jump forward and see what you can make of her from the foreyard."

At the cry of a sail, Mike, Abdallah and many others came on deck.

The man in the main-top again sang out:

"She is a large schooner, on the same tack; I can see her plainly."

And almost immediately Ben Spears, the boatswain, hailed from the foreyard: "The strange sail is bearing up, sir."

"All right, you can come down; I can make her out from the deck, now."

"What do you think she is?" asked Doctor Clark, after the captain had taken a long look at the vessel through his glass.

"I cannot tell; she does not look like a cruiser, and if she is not, her motions are suspicious; we cannot be too cautious in these waters. Tom, order the drummer to beat to quarters."

As soon as the sharp, quick roll of the drum was heard, officers and men sprang to their proper places as promptly and with as little confusion as there would have been on a man-of-war.

The guns were cast loose and shotted, ready to be run out, ammunition handled, boarding-pikes unlashd, and small arms loaded and placed in the racks.

The flag of the Falcon floated from the mast-head, but the mysterious stranger showed no colors. She came bowling along under a crowd of sail, as if she had been an albatross skimming over the surface of the sea.

"She certainly means mischief," said Captain Parker to Doctor Clark, who approached him, accompanied by Tom, Mike and Abdallah, all of them having cutlasses buckled around their waists, and rifles in their hands.

"Why do you not open fire on her?" asked the doctor.

"I wish them to show their hands first. Forecastle there! Mr. Spears, is the boat gun loaded?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Then throw a shot across her bow!"

Bang went the gun, and the shot ricocheted along the water about a cable's length ahead of the approaching vessel.

The smoke had scarcely cleared away when a round ball shot up to the head of her main-mast; the lanyard was jerked and the next instant the black flag fluttered in the breeze.

CHAPTER VIII.

BLOODY FIGHT WITH THE PIRATES—IN THE MIDST OF PERIL.

The piratical vessel bore straight down on the Falcon, evidently intending to lay her aboard.

"Clap a round of grape over the shot in each of the guns!" ordered Captain Parker.

The order was obeyed and the men, who were instructed not to show themselves, were grouped, some around the guns, with their jackets off and cutlasses girded on, while others—the small-arm men—were lying on the deck, concealed by the quarters, with loaded muskets in their hands.

The two vessels neared each other; the pirate was swarming with men, with boarding-pike and cutlass in hand; they were crowded at quarters, on the forecastle and poop, until there scarcely appeared to be standing room.

When within half-musket shot the pirate abandoned the idea of boarding and put his helm to port, with the intention of passing under the stern of the Falcon, and raking her.

To prevent this the Falcon was luffed up sharp in the wind, and her broadside and a volley of small arms poured into the crowded mass on the pirate's deck, mowing them down like grass.

The effect of the broadside was terrific; the decks were converted into a very shambles, while the blood gushed and gurgled through her scuppers and ran down her sides in horrible streams.

A mingled sound of cries, groans and curses arose, and far above it and more prolonged was heard a piercing yell, and then a long, melancholy howl.

"Slaves on board! I know that sound well!" muttered Doctor Clark.

The broadside was promptly returned, but in the confusion of the moment the guns were not aimed well and very little damage was done.

"Down with the helm and let her come 'round," said Captain Parker.

The Falcon stood right across the stern of the piratical vessel, within thirty yards of her spanker-boom, and raked her with a perfect storm of shot from the pivot-gun and larboard broadside, to which she could only reply with her two stern-chasers and small arms.

But the pirate soon drew out from under the fire, wore ship and endeavored to lay aboard of the Falcon.

But she was kept away, and the two vessels ran along, side by side, exchanging murderous broadsides, at pistol-shot distance, until they were so completely enveloped in a dense cloud of smoke that their positions were only indicated by the flashes of the guns.

The fire of the pirate gradually slackened, and then stopped altogether; the Falcon drew ahead, ceased firing and lay-to.

Tom, who, with Mike and Abdallah, had been doing good service with their rifles, approached Captain Parker and asked:

"Do you think she has struck her colors?"

"I cannot say," was the reply; "we will lay-to until the smoke lifts, and then we shall see."

The smoke cleared away a little and the pirate was seen standing in toward the shore; the Falcon followed, pumping shot into her with her pivot gun and bow chasers.

The pirate was apparently running into destruction; a long, low line of reefs, over which the breakers dashed and foamed, lay directly in her course, about a mile from shore.

"He will be lost; I expect to see her strike every moment," said Doctor Clark.

But Captain Parker shook his head and replied:

"That fellow knows what he is about."

The vessel dashed into the breakers, and in an instant they were flashing all around her.

Those on the Falcon held their breath and ejaculated:

"She strikes! Yes! No, she has cleared them!"

The pirate vessel, after just grazing the reef, glided across the smooth water beyond and into the narrow channel which separated a small island from the mainland, and came to anchor in a little cove, where she was concealed from view,

with the exception of the tops of her masts, by the island in front.

"What shall we do now, Doctor Clark?" asked Captain Parker. "I do not like to leave the fellow, and would not care to risk the Falcon in the breakers."

"Board her in the boat, by all means," promptly replied the doctor.

"Just my idea exactly, but as it is likely to be pretty sharp work I preferred to have the suggestion come from you. Boarders, away!"

The ropes rattled through the davit blocks and three boats splashed into the water; the men were told off and entered them, armed with pistols and cutlasses.

Tom Gale, who was accompanied by Mike and Abdallah, commanded one, Captain Parker another, and the second mate of the Falcon the third.

"Give way, my lads, and keep behind the island as long as possible," said the captain.

Following the course which had been pursued by the pirates the reef was passed without difficulty; as the boats rounded the end of the island a gun loaded with grape-shot was fired at them, but fortunately was not depressed sufficiently, and the charge passed over their heads.

"Give way, men, with a will!"

The boats dashed up on either side of the vessel hooked on, and the men, led by Tom, Captain Parker and the mate, scrambled up the sides, jumped on deck and engaged in a furious hand-to-hand fight with a villainous-looking set of desperadoes, armed with knives, boarding-pikes and cutlasses. The men soon became so mixed that it was difficult to strike a blow without the risk of cutting down a friend.

But under the determined lead of Captain Parker, Tom and Mike, who acted like heroes, the crew of the Falcon gradually forced the pirates back.

The pirate captain, a tall, swarthy man, with a sash around his waist and a red fez cap on his head, fought desperately, encouraging his men, until a sudden rush separated him from them when Tom sprang forward with the bound of a tiger and attacked him fiercely.

Tom was a fine swordsman, but soon found that he had met his equal.

For some time they cut, thrust and parried, without either gaining any advantage, when the foot of the pirate slipped in the blood with which the deck was drenched, and before he could recover himself Tom brought him to his knees with a terrific cut on the head, which would have split his skull if the thick felt of his cap had not in some measure deadened the force of the blow.

As it was he was stunned and dropped his sword.

"Surrender!" said Tom, "or you are a dead man!"

Quick as lightning the pirate drew a pistol from his belt, fired full at Tom's head, the ball just grazing his cheek, darted back and disappeared down the companionway, closely pursued by Tom.

Mike, who had witnessed the conclusion of the combat, followed close behind.

The pirate entered his cabin, and before Tom could prevent him, closed and locked the door.

Without pausing to parley, Tom and Mike broke it open and entered.

The fore-part was divided from the aft-part of the cabin by a bulkhead; in it was a door, fastened on the other side, which the pirate captain, with a long, keen dagger in his hand, was attempting to force.

"Drop that knife, you villain!" shouted Tom, covering him with a pistol.

He threw the dagger on the floor, and, saying, "Gentlemen, I am your prisoner; do with me as you will," walked to the

fore-part of the cabin, seated himself, took a cigar from a bunch on the table, lit it and began to smoke.

The sound of the conflict on deck ceased, the pirates having been killed, disabled or captured.

Captain Parker and a number of his men came trooping into the cabin.

"The vessel is ours, Tom," said the captain.

Before any reply could be made the pirate captain stopped and touched with the live coal on his cigar what looked like the end of a small rope, projecting through the bulkhead at the front end of the cabin; there was a slight flash and a sparkle, and it disappeared, leaving a strong scent of burning powder.

In an instant Tom had the pirate by the throat with one hand, drew a pistol with the other and yelled:

"What is that, you rascal?"

The pirate, who was nearly throttled by the grasp, turned toward him, and his face, over which the blood from his wounded head was slowly trickling lit up with a glare of fiendish malignity, as he hissed out:

"I have fired the magazine and in less than three minutes we will all be blown into eternity!"

"I will not go in company with such a scoundrel as you are!" answered Tom as he pressed the trigger of his pistol; then dashing the pirate from him with his brains blown out, a quivering corpse, he shouted:

"To the boats, men!"

But they needed no bidding, and were already tumbling up on deck.

Tom and Mike, being the furthest from the cabin door, were the last to reach it; they were just passing through it when from the aft cabin there rang out a long, piercing shriek, such as can only issue from the lips of a woman in extreme peril.

Tom, followed by Mike, rushed back to the door and shaking it, said:

"Open the door, quick; we are friends."

"The bolt is bent and will not slide," replied a voice from the inside.

"Stand out of the way, then; now, Mike!"

And the two hurled themselves against the door with such force that it was dashed from its hinges, and they were carried forward into the cabin by the impetus.

An exquisitely beautiful girl, robed in white, with her long, golden hair streaming over her shoulders in wild confusion, clasping a child to her breast, threw herself at Tom's feet, exclaiming in tones of abject terror:

"Save us! Save us from the pirate!"

Another young woman, quite small and very pretty, was lying on a sofa in a dead faint.

It was no time for ceremony. Tom took the child on one arm and placing the other around the fair suppliant, carried, rather than supported her on deck.

Mike picked up the insensible little fairy and followed.

The rescue of the women did not take more than a minute, but when Mike reached the deck he saw the boats nearly a hundred yards off, darting away in different directions, the men pulling as if they would crack their sinews in their eagerness to escape the impending danger.

Tom, who had run to the gangway, seeing that he was left, put the child down on the deck and stood supporting his female companion.

"Overboard with ye! Jump overboard! Sure, it's our only chance!" shouted Mike, rushing toward the side of the vessel.

But Tom barred his way, and, as he tried to pass, said in a voice of thunder:

"Hold! On your life, look!" and pointed to the water.

Mike gave one glance and recoiled as if his sight had been blasted.

Merciful heavens! A powder magazine, which was mo-

mentarily expected to blow up, was beneath their feet, and the sea around the vessel was red with blood and alive with shoals of huge, ferocious sharks, who lashed the water into crimson foam, as they tore to pieces the dead men who had fallen, or been thrown overboard, and struggled and fought for the fragments.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE JAWS OF DEATH.

It seemed as if no help could come from man, and that there was little time to make their peace with God.

Most men, under the circumstances, would have abandoned themselves to despair.

But Tom was not a boy to remain idle when there was the ghost of a chance to do anything.

Releasing his hold on the girl, who immediately fell on her knees and commenced praying, he darted down below.

Mike placed his insensible burden on the deck and followed.

He had no idea what Tom's object was, but meant to stick to him under all circumstances.

Tom hurried to the magazine, and, finding the door open, stepped in.

The sparkling of the ignited fuse-rope caught his eye; springing over the body of a man who lay in his way Tom clapped his foot on the lighted end of the rope.

Then grasping the rope with his hand he jerked the other end of it out of a hole through which it was thrust into a barrel of powder.

At that moment Mike made his appearance at the door of the magazine.

"Quick!" said Tom; "bring a bucket of water."

Mike rushed on deck, seized one of the buckets with a rope attached, used for drawing water to wash the deck with, threw it over the side, drew it up, full, and was back to the magazine in the twinkling of an eye.

"Pour the water over this fuse," said Tom, "and around my foot."

Mike complied, and then Tom said:

"Thank God, we are safe!"

Mike clasped his hand and wrung it.

For nearly a minute neither of them spoke; their feelings were too deep for words.

"Sure, an' there was no toime to 'splane," said Mike, picking up the remnant of the fuse-rope, which was less than two feet long.

"No," replied Tom, "it was a close shave; the fuse felt damp when I caught hold of it, and it did not seem to burn very fast; if it had been a little quicker I would have been too late."

"It's red with blood, an' that's the rayson ther fire didn't rache ther powther."

An examination revealed the fact that the head of the man who lay dead on the floor had been taken off by a cannon-ball, and his blood had dampened the fuse-rope sufficiently to make it burn slowly.

But for this accident and Tom's prompt action, the pirate captain would have succeeded in his diabolical attempt to blow up the vessel.

After locking the door of the magazine Tom and Mike went on deck and found that the girl Mike had brought out of the cabin had regained consciousness.

As soon as they had assured the two females of their safety, Tom and Mike hauled down the black flag and ran up to the mast-head the American flag, which they found with a number of others on deck.

The men in the boats having reached what they considered a

safe distance, were lying on their oars expecting to see the vessel blown up.

When they saw the stars and stripes they set up a shout that made the welkin ring, rowed back to the vessel and came on board.

Tom explained what had happened, and they gave three cheers for him.

After complimenting the two boys and congratulating them upon their safety, Captain Parker said:

"We tumbled into the boats promiscuously and did not know you were left behind until it was too late to return; as things turned out, however, it was very fortunate that you remained on board."

The men were at once set to work splicing the rigging and plugging the shot holes in the vessel, while Captain Parker, Tom and Mike, after conducting the girls back to their cabin, examined the prize.

"Mike," said Tom, as he looked at the dead pirate captain, "I think I have seen this man before to-day."

"Be jabbers an' ye may well say so," replied Mike. "I remember him meself, now, by the token that he's ther man who tould Saul Harris an' ther other villain to be quick when they went ter hang us, and get back to ther ship."

"You are right; I wonder where Saul and his companion are? I did not see either of them in the fight."

"It's more than loikely that they stayed in New York, bad luck to thim."

"Very probably they did."

Tom and Mike were mistaken as to the whereabouts of Saul and Ortega, but they were right about Captain Butler.

A piece of blackened canvas was found nailed over the name of the ship; it was removed, and she was ascertained to be the Harpy.

The ship was well stocked with provisions and ammunition, and there was a large quantity of different kinds of goods on board, indicating that several vessels had been plundered.

In the hold upward of a hundred negro men were found shackled.

Their irons were knocked off, and Abdallah, on speaking to them, found that they nearly all belonged to the tribe of which his father was once king.

The delight of the negroes on being informed that they would be set free was scarcely as great as the joy they evinced at meeting the son of their old king.

In a few hours the shot holes were plugged and the rigging pretty well patched up.

The anchor was weighed, sails hoisted, and the vessel carried out to where the Falcon was lying-to.

Doctor Clark, who had remained on the Falcon, came on board; after some consultation it was determined to proceed up the coast to the first place that afforded a good anchorage, and give the two ships a thorough overhauling.

Leaving Tom, Mike and enough men under command of the second mate on the Harpy to navigate her, Captain Parker and the doctor returned to the Falcon.

The two vessels sailed along near each other until night began to set in, with every indication of bad weather, when they ran into a bay and came to anchor.

When Tom and Mike came on deck after eating supper, they could not see the Falcon, though they knew she was only a few cable lengths' distant from them.

And as the darkness increased the wind arose until it blew violently from the southwest, to which point the bay was completely open, and it seemed as if the whole of the south Atlantic Ocean was being driven into it by the gale.

The storm increased in violence and the howling of the wind and the thunder of the billows on the shore were tremendous.

When the tide arose the tempest was at its height, and the sight was awful.

It was impossible to stand on deck without clinging to the rigging. The bursts of wind came almost with the force of cannon shot, and a driving rain smote with the keenness of hail.

A low, grating noise mingled with the roar of the breakers; the vessel was moving in spite of the anchor and cable.

There was a moment of breathless suspense, and then there burst forth a cry of terror and despair.

"She is dragging her anchor! We are lost—we are lost!"

The anchor caught again, but a violent plunge of the ship snapped the cable and the storm had the Harpy at its mercy.

The sea was white with its own dashings, and every mountain surge that swept to the shore was edged with light.

As the Harpy was driving onward with fearful speed, through the sea of phosphorus and foam, a huge corpusant formed on the head of the main-mast and shed a ghastly, unnatural light over the helpless vessel.

The roar of the breakers became nearer and more distinct every moment. Then there was a violent crash and the ship staggered as if smitten by some unearthly power below.

Then the ship was hurled forward with threefold violence, the breakers dashing over her and lifting her up and again dashing her down with such fury that it seemed impossible for her to hold together a moment.

But she continued to forge onward, and after a few minutes ceased to strike the bottom!

"Heave the lead!" was the cry.

It was done; and the leadsman sang out:

"Eight fathoms, clay bottom!"

"Let go the anchor."

One of the bow anchors was dropped; it held, and the Harpy swung around with her head to the wind.

The Harpy had evidently forged over a bar of some kind into a position where she was to some degree protected from the wind, though the waves ran so high that they occasionally broke over her.

The well was sounded and it was found that notwithstanding the tremendous pounding she had received the vessel was not leaking.

"We are comparatively safe," said Tom, who, with Mike, had remained on deck. "I wish I knew that the Falcon was as well off."

"Heaven preserve us or we are lost!" ejaculated Mike.

The crew uttered yells of terror and ran about the deck as if bereft of reason.

A flash of lightning showed the Falcon with a lurid distinctness infinitely clearer than day as she arose on the crest of a huge billow and came dashing down like an avalanche on the Harpy.

CHAPTER X.

ALMOST RUN DOWN—THE RESCUED MAIDEN.

The vivid flash of lightning which showed the Falcon bearing down on them, was followed by intense darkness.

Unable to do anything to avert the destruction that threatened them, Tom and Mike awaited their fate in breathless suspense.

And now above the howling of the storm was heard the rush and roar of the water around the bow of the Falcon as she dashed onward with the speed of a race horse.

Then there was a deafening crash and a terrible shock that threw every one prostrate.

The Harpy, trembling like a leaf, heeled over to one side

so far that the waves washed her deck from stem to stern, while her shivered yards and broken rigging rattled down like hail.

For a moment or two it seemed as if the ship would capsize; then she righted and rode on an even keel.

Everything was in the wildest confusion on board, and it was dangerous to be on deck, for the furious wind made the parted rigging thrash about like gigantic whips.

"All hands to clear the wreck!" was the cry, and the men set to work with a will.

It was soon discovered that a portion of the rail had been carried away, some of the yards broken off and the rigging badly damaged, otherwise the Harpy was uninjured.

Soon after the collision the Falcon, which was very little injured by it, came to anchor.

There was no more lightning, for the storm had begun to subside, so those on the Falcon did not know whether the Harpy had been run down or not.

The flash of lightning that showed those on board the Harpy their danger, saved them.

The bottom of the bay where the two vessels anchored was hard rock, upon which the anchors would not take hold.

At the height of the storm, when there was high water, the Falcon commenced to drag her anchor.

The ship was so completely embayed that there was no chance to claw off, and there was every prospect of her going on a dangerous lee-shore.

Regarding the loss of the vessel as inevitable, Captain Parker, being a prudent commander and thorough sailor, immediately proceeded to do everything possible to save the lives of the crew.

The main and mizzen masts were cut away, the cable slipped, and the Falcon run right before the wind and waves, with all the canvas that possibly could be set, and on toward the part of the shore which the lightning showed to be the lowest.

Owing to her being lightened by the cutting away of the masts, and the momentum which she gained by running before the wind under sail, the Falcon forged over the bar with much less bumping than the Harpy received.

On discovering that he was about to run the latter vessel down, Captain Parker sang out: "Port the helm;" and short as the distance was between the two ships the Falcon changed her course enough to make their contact comparatively slight, though the shock was severe.

This could not have been accomplished had the positions of the vessels been different, but the Harpy was riding with her head to the wind, and the Falcon was running straight before it.

As soon as Tom and Mike were satisfied that the Harpy was safe, they went down to the cabin and quieted the fears of the two girls, who, after thanking them, retired to rest in the inner cabin.

Tom and Mike took possession of the front cabin, but as they did not know what had become of the Falcon, they were too anxious about their friends on board of her to sleep much.

The two boys were on deck long before it was light, peering anxiously through the gloom in hopes of discovering the ship.

When day broke, to their great joy they saw the Falcon lying at anchor only a few hundred yards away.

A few minutes later one of her boats was lowered and Captain Parker and Doctor Clark came on board of the Harpy.

They were received at the gangway by Tom and Mike. After mutual congratulations upon their safety, and some talk about the occurrences of the night, they proceeded to examine the ship.

While thus engaged one of the sailors announced that breakfast was ready, and the party adjourned to the cabin, where

they found a luxurious repast which had been prepared from the pirate's abundant supplies.

Before sitting down to the table, Tom, after consulting Doctor Clark, knocked at the door of the inner cabin and invited the two girls to join them at breakfast.

The invitation was accepted, and in a few minutes the girls made their appearance, bringing the little boy with them.

They were a little timid at first, but the kind and courteous manner in which they were treated soon put them at their ease.

After breakfast Doctor Clark said:

"My dear young ladies, we would be pleased to know whom we have the honor of entertaining, and how you happened to fall into the hands of the pirates?"

The girl that Tom carried on deck the day before replied:

"My name is Marie. I am the daughter of Count Robert de Castlemain, of Normandy, France. This is my cousin, Louise Ashton, and the little boy is my brother, Orlando."

"Mademoiselle, you speak English with great purity," said Captain Parker.

"My mother is an American," replied Marie, "and so is Cousin Louise."

"About six months ago," continued Marie, "my grandfather died, and my father succeeded to the title and estates of the family."

"As soon as my father could arrange his affairs he had his yacht, the *L'Orient*, fitted out for a long voyage, employed a strong crew and sailed for Africa, bringing his family and Cousin Louise with him."

"His object was to have a thorough search made for my Uncle Henri, who some years ago came to this country and had never been heard of afterward."

"We reached Africa without accident, and coasted along the shore, stopping at various places, sent parties into the interior, and tried to get some intelligence about Uncle Henri in every way we could think of."

"But we were unsuccessful, and about ten days ago the yacht was captured by the pirates on the *Harpy*."

"They kept the American flag flying until they were so close that we could not escape."

"Then they came on the *L'Orient* in such numbers the most of our crew were soon killed and my father and the rest of his men overpowered."

"Immediately after the capture of the yacht the two vessels were run in close to the shore, and anchored."

"Father and the other men were heavily ironed and thrust down into the hold."

"Mother, Cousin Louise, Orlando and myself were allowed to stay in the cabin, but Captain Butler, commander of the *Harpy*, Ortega, his first mate and a young man named Harris, who seemed to have no command, but was intimate with Ortega, were constantly intruding on us and were very offensive and insulting."

"The pirates spent a week trading with the natives, who came to the shore in great numbers, but very few of whom were allowed to come on the vessels."

"Then father, mother and the captured sailors were sent on shore and delivered to the savages."

"Louise and myself begged that we might go with them, but the pirates jeered at our prayers, brought us, with little Orlando, on board of the *Harpy*, and confined us in the after-cabin."

"That afternoon Captain Butler and Ortega had an angry dispute in the main cabin."

"There are cracks in the partition and we could see and hear everything that transpired."

"The captain and Ortega both wished to marry me in order to secure my father's fortune; and each proposed to divide the property with the other."

"But neither of them was willing to trust the other; Ortega was equally as determined as the captain, and words ran so high that we thought they would come to blows."

"After wrangling a while, Ortega said:

"Let Saul Harris marry the girl, leave her with you, go to France, carrying proofs of his marriage and of the death of her parents, sell the property and return with the money. I'll go with him and he dare not play me false."

"To this proposition the captain finally agreed. Harris was called down into the cabin and eagerly promised to do what was required of him."

"Some papers were drawn up and signed and all the details of their horrible plan discussed."

"Saul Harris, though quite young, seemed to be the most cold-blooded and heartless, for he even suggested that he should carry the corpses of my dear parents with him to France, to prove that they were dead."

"Oh! wasn't it terrible?" asked Marie, giving way to her feelings and burying her tearful face in her hands."

"Horrible—horrible—horrible indeed!" ejaculated her deeply interested listeners."

"It was devilish!" said Doctor Clark, emphatically. "The utter heartlessness of a villain who deliberately proposed to use the remains of his murdered victims to perpetrate a fraud is almost beyond conception."

"I wonder that you did not die with terror when you heard their diabolical plot," said Captain Parker."

Tom and Mike did not make any remarks, but their flashing eyes, compressed lips and clenched hands gave evidence of the burning indignation that filled their breasts."

After weeping silently a few minutes Marie continued:

"At first I felt as if my heart was turned to ice, and I was deathly sick and faint. Then I went to the lockers and searched until I found a dagger; I concealed it in my dress and grew calmer; for I had determined to sheath the weapon in my heart before I would be forced into that odious marriage."

"Ortega said that to guard against any trouble in France the marriage ceremony must be performed by an ordained priest, and also by a regularly appointed civil officer."

"So it was determined to touch at some small port where there were no war vessels or forts, inveigle a counsel and priest on board, force them to perform the ceremony and give the necessary certificates, then make away with them."

"As my consent was not considered to be of any importance whatever, nothing was said to me about their plans, and the next day Ortega, Harris and a part of the pirates went off on the *L'Orient*."

"The day following, the *Harpy* sailed in the same direction."

"On our knees, Cousin Louise and myself besought Captain Butler to send us back to my parents, and assured him that father would gladly give up all of his property if our lives were spared."

"Captain Butler replied that father and mother would be executed by the savages, and that we need not dream of escaping, for if there was any prospect of our doing so he would kill us with his own hands."

"Just as he finished speaking your ship was reported to be in sight; supposing her to be an unarmed merchant vessel, the pirates made preparations to capture her."

"Louise and myself shut ourselves up in the after-cabin and fastened the door on the inside. You are aware of what happened afterward."

The two girls had become deeply moved and highly excited during this recital, so after assuring them of his protection and promising that everything possible should be done to rescue Count de Castlemain and the other captives, Doctor Clark left them to regain their composure, and went on deck, accompanied by Captain Parker, Tom and Mike."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BATTLE ON THE BLUFF—HAND TO HAND.

When they came on deck the sun had cleared the mist away, and the night of terror was succeeded by a bright, beautiful day.

The ships were in a broad river, whose banks were clothed with luxuriant, tropical vegetation, among which birds of the gayest plumage were perpetually glancing, while troops of monkeys were chasing each other through the branches or feeding on the fruit and nuts.

To the south the land was low and level, but a short distance from the northern shore there was a precipitous, rocky mountain, a spur of which terminated abruptly at the water's edge, opposite the Falcon, in a bluff several hundred feet high.

As no one had discovered the mouth of the river the afternoon before, when the ships came to anchor in the bay, Captain Parker ordered the crew into the jolly boat and accompanied by Tom and Mike, went to examine the entrance of the stream.

After rowing a short distance their further progress was stopped by a sand bar, which entirely closed the mouth of the river.

"We are in a nice box," said the captain; "we are completely shut in."

"I don't understand how vessels drawing as much water as the Falcon and Harpy could pass over that bar," said Tom.

"The explanation is very simple; it was flood tide, an immense quantity of water was driven into the bay by the gale, and the bar was not as high when we passed over it as it is now, for it was evidently formed in some degree at least by the storm."

At that moment the sharp, rattling sound of small arms was heard, followed by the report of several heavy guns.

"Give way, men!" shouted Captain Parker. "The vessels are attacked!"

The men strained at the oars till the stout ash bent like blades of tempered steel, and the boat darted through the water, swift as an arrow.

A strong party, sheltered among the thick timber on the bluff opposite the Falcon, were sweeping her deck with a perfect storm of balls and arrows.

The men on board had fired several carronades at their assailants; but finding that the pieces could not be elevated sufficiently to do any damage, were now returning the fire with small arms.

But those on the bluff, having the advantage of position, and being well protected by rocks and the dense growth of trees, were evidently more than a match for the crew of the Falcon.

Apparently, no shots were aimed at the Harpy, which was several hundred yards nearer to the bar.

"Pull to the Harpy!" ordered Captain Parker, who took in the state of affairs at a glance.

The boat dashed alongside of her and the men lay on their oars.

"Tom," said the captain, hurriedly, "I wish you to take Abdallah and twelve of the men off the Harpy, land, make a rush, and try to distract the attention of those rascals, while I go ashore to attack them with the crew of the Falcon. You will have to commence the fight, but I'll be in at the death!"

"Cap'n," said Mike, "sure, an' I'd like ter go wid Tom."

"Certainly; up with you both. I must be off."

Tom and Mike sprang on board of the Harpy, and the boat with Captain Parker dashed off for the Falcon.

Abdallah had remained on board the Harpy to keep order

among the rescued negroes, and he met the two boys as they came up the side.

"Will any of your colored friends fight?" asked Tom.

"All of them," replied Abdallah; "they are warriors."

"Good! Assemble them on deck at once; we have to land and drive those fellows from the bluff."

Thirty of the negroes understood the use of firearms. They were each given a musket, the rest were armed with boarding-pikes and cutlasses.

Tom, Mike, Abdallah and the sailors were each armed with two revolvers and a cutlass.

While the men were getting ready Tom had a tub of strong grog made and gave each of them a large drink.

It required two trips of the boats to land the party, but as the distance was short, and, fortunately, the smoke of the firing floated along the face of the water, they were not observed.

When the men were mustered on the shore Tom found that he had a very respectable force.

In addition to Mike and Abdallah, there were twelve sailors and ninety-six negroes.

The ascent of the bluff on the side they were was a gentle slope, covered with trees.

Tom instructed the men to move forward quietly but swiftly, and fall on the enemy as soon as they were in sight.

Mike was placed in command on the right, Abdallah on the left, and Tom led the centre.

"Are you ready?" asked Tom.

"Ready!" replied Mike and Abdallah.

"March!" and away they went.

Creeping up the slope through the trees noiseless as serpents, Tom and his band came upon the right flank of a large party of white men and savages.

They were so intently engaged in pouring a devastating fire upon the men who were exposed on the Falcon while lowering the boats, that Tom was within ten paces of them before he was discovered.

"Fire!" shouted Tom.

And his men poured in a volley, close and deadly.

"Charge!" cried Tom, leading the way, followed by the men, who uttered a yell and rushed forward—furious, ravenous for blood.

Some of the negroes used their bayonets, but most of them clubbed their muskets.

A powder pall enveloped Tom, Mike and the sailors, but the roar of their revolvers told how they were at work.

When the charges in their pistols were exhausted they drew their cutlasses and gave the enemy cold steel, which was not so noisy, but equally as deadly.

The men on the bluff, though taken completely by surprise, outnumbered their assailants and made a determined stand.

Tom, Mike and Abdallah were ever in advance of their men, cheering them on by word and deed.

The melee was hot and terrible; never was there a fight more rapid or desperate.

During the heat of the action Tom found himself confronted by Ortega; the recognition was mutual, and they sprang toward each other eagerly.

"Villain, I have you now!" cried Tom as they crossed swords.

"I'll make crow's meat of your carcass," replied Ortega, with an oath.

"Take that!" said Tom, as with a dexterous cut he laid Ortega's cheek open from forehead to chin.

Furious with rage, Ortega showered his blows like hail, and his cuts and thrusts followed each other with such lightning rapidity and force that it seemed impossible for any one to stand before him.

Nothing but Tom's coolness, excellent swordsmanship and

extreme agility saved him from being thrust through or cut down.

But there was no wavering in the steady light that burned in Tom's bright eyes, and never a tremor on his stern, set face as without giving back an inch he avoided or parried the trenchant blade of his gigantic adversary and paid him back with interest in his own coin.

In the appearance and demeanor of the two there was something irresistibly suggestive of a fight between a savage bull and a clean-limbed, thoroughbred terrier.

Nor was it long before the brawny, black-browed Ortega gnashed his teeth in impotent rage as he was forced to admit that in the slender youth before him he had met a foeman more than worthy of his steel.

For in less than three minutes he was wounded as many times, while Tom was untouched.

Seeing that his men began to waver and give back, Ortega, concentrating all of his immense strength, aimed a blow at Tom's head, which, had it taken effect as intended, would have cloven him to the chin.

Tom threw up his sword to guard his head, and the descending blade was turned aside.

But the stroke was given with so much force that Tom's sword was shattered to pieces.

With a hoarse cry of triumph Ortega sprang forward with his sword raised to repeat the blow.

But quick as thought Tom hurled the heavy hilt of his sword at Ortega's head. It struck him between the eyes with such violence that he staggered back, stunned, and was immediately borne away by some of his followers.

With the fall of Ortega ended everything like organized resistance, though there were a number of personal encounters afterward.

The negroes broke first, and afterward the white men.

As long as there was any chance of overtaking the fugitives they were pursued and cut down mercilessly.

Over fifty were slain. The almost impenetrable nature of the undergrowth alone saved the remainder of the fugitives.

CHAPTER XII.

SAUL HARRIS—ON THE EVE OF A DEATH-GRAPPLE.

"Who-o-o-o-p! Ho-o-o-o-ray!" shouted Mike, when the pursuit was over, waving his cutlass, which was dripping with blood from hilt to point over his head. "Tom, we've bate thim inter smithereens!"

"Yes, pretty hot time, was it not?" replied Tom. "Are you all right?"

"Sound as a dollar, barrin' a hole or two in me clothes; an' you, Tom?"

"Not a scratch."

"Bully! An' who d'ye think I saw, tho'?"

"That big-bearded fellow that helped hang us. I don't know his name; we met and he came very near putting an end to me."

"Ther mischief! Thin both of ther villains wor here, for by ther howly poker I wor spakin' of Saul Harris."

"When did you see him?"

"At ther commincement of ther fight, an' by ther powers, he run like blazes at ther first fire!"

"I'd like to meet him."

"Wouldn't I, tho'! Ther whole gang av thim wor betwane us, so I jist sint a bullet afther him, an', bedad, from ther way he grabbed at ther tail av his coat I'm thinkin' it's not very aisy he'll be failin' when he takes a sate to rist himself."

"Since hearing Marie's story I am more anxious to get hold of him than ever."

"So am I. Tom, d'ye moind what we said on ther Clinton?"

"I do, and hold to it."

"An' I; sure, an' we'll stick together."

"Now and forever, through thick and thin!"

At that moment Captain Parker and his men made their appearance.

Intending to attack the enemy in the rear the captain landed with his men on the opposite side of the bluff from where Tom ascended.

But the ground was so rough and broken that the captain had to make a considerable detour, and when he reached the scene of action the fight was over.

Nor was he fortunate enough to intercept the fugitives, for they saw him coming ashore, and being familiar with the ground, easily eluded him.

Captain Parker was somewhat chagrined at being too late to participate in the encounter, but he was glad of Tom and Mike's success, and delighted to find that they were both safe.

He praised them highly for the gallant manner in which they had acted, and said that their victory was something to be proud of the longest day of their lives.

Quite a number of Tom's men, principally negroes, were killed or wounded. After the latter were cared for, Captain Parker and the two boys walked over the ground where the combat took place.

When passing a thick clump of bushes they heard a deep groan, and turned aside to find the person who uttered it.

They found one of the white men belonging to the party who were driven from the bluff. He had been shot through the thigh while retreating, and crawled into the bushes for concealment.

Expecting death if he was discovered, the man had kept silent, until, weakened by loss of blood, the pain of his wound wrung from him the groan which led to his discovery.

The wounded man, though severely hurt and very faint, was still dangerous, for he thrust a pistol in Tom's face and pulled the trigger when the latter was bending over him to see where he was hurt.

Fortunately the weapon snapped, otherwise Tom would have been instantly killed.

Tom wrenched the pistol from the fellow and proceeded to tie up his wound as coolly as if nothing had happened.

The man evinced no gratitude for the attention paid him, and when Captain Parker asked him some questions, remained sullenly silent.

After giving the captain a quick look, which he understood, Tom cocked the pistol, pointed it at the prisoner's head, and, grinding his teeth together, said:

"You villain, if you do not want your brains blown out you had better answer my questions."

Cowed by the yawning muzzle of the pistol the man whined out that he would do as he was bidden.

"Who are you and where do you belong?" asked Tom.

"I am a sailor, and one of the crew of the Harpy."

"How did you happen to attack us without first finding out who we were?"

"We saw the two ships anchor in the bay yesterday afternoon, and Juan Ortega, our mate, made out with his glass that the Harpy was captured and we wanted to get her back."

"It was Ortega's party that made the attack, was it?"

"Yes."

"To whom were the Count de Castlemain and the other prisoners delivered?"

"To Monka, King of the Banogas."

"What did he intend to do with them?"

"Burn them as a sacrifice."

"Where is Monka now?"

"At his town, some days' journey north of here. The negroes with us were his warriors; they marched through the country, but we came down the coast in the L'Orient."

"What was the object of your expedition?"

"To plunder villages and capture slaves."

"Where is the L'Orient?"

"She is——"

The sentence was never completed; the man fainted away, and in a few minutes died from the loss of blood.

Boom—boom—boom! went three heavy guns in quick succession.

"To the boats, men! The ships are attacked!" shouted Captain Parker, darting away, followed by his men.

"By Jove!" said Tom, "the very skies are raining enemies to-day!"

Quickly ordering Abdallah to remain on the bluff with the wounded, and such of the negroes as there was not room for in the boats, Tom dashed down the slope, followed by Mike and the rest of his men.

They reached their boats in a few minutes, tumbled in and shoved off.

The river, some six or seven yards above the Falcon, was black with canoes filled with armed savages, who were paddling toward the vessels.

"Give way for your lives, men!" said Tom. "Pull for the Falcon!"

Tom decided on this course because he saw at a glance that the first attack must necessarily be made on the Falcon, and believed that if the savages were beaten off in their attempt to capture her they would not try to board the Harpy.

Flushed with their late victory, and eager to meet the new enemy, his men made the boats fairly fly over the water.

As the boats approached the Falcon Tom said:

"This boat's crew will keep their places; the rest of you get on board as quickly as you can."

When they came alongside of the ship Tom hailed:

"Falcon—ahoy! Throw us the end of a hawser and be lively about it!"

The men that had been left in charge of the ship were all on deck, and one of them obeyed the order instantly.

Ben Spears, the boatswain, who was in Tom's boat, caught the end of the hawser as it fell.

The Falcon had swung around when the storm ceased, and was now riding with her head up stream.

"Pull ahead, men!" ordered Tom. "Spears, bend the hawser to the cable."

"Shiver my timbers!" said Spears; "you are right, sir, and I'm a blockhead not to have remembered that the ship could not be fought to advantage if we did not have a spring on the cable."

The main body of savages moved forward very slowly, and others were constantly joining them.

But about a dozen canoes had approached so near that just as Spears began to attach the hawser to the cable they let fly a shower of arrows.

Most of them, however, fell short; but as some of the savages continued to paddle, while the others used their bows, the arrows soon began to whistle around the boat thick as hail, and two of the crew were wounded before Spears was through.

"Steady, men, steady!" said Tom, who never flinched, and the sailors, catching his spirit, behaved like heroes.

"All right!" said Spears.

"Pull, men; send her through the water!" shouted Tom.

The men bent to the oars; the boat darted back to the Falcon and they scrambled up her side.

Captain Parker, who had just come on board, seized Tom's hand, and, as he wrung it, said:

"Well thought of and bravely done, my boy; without a

spring on the cable our heavy guns would be well nigh useless."

Quickly and clearly Captain Parker issued his orders and his well-trained crew executed them almost as soon as uttered.

In an incredibly short space of time the boats were hoisted and the hawser carried aft and the ship brought around so that her larboard broadside bore on the approaching foe, guns loaded and the vessel ready for action.

Apparently all of the canoes that were expected had now joined them and the savages came sweeping down, dark and threatening as a thunder-cloud.

CHAPTER XIII.

MIKE IN THE JAWS OF A LION.

A short time after the boats had reached the ship the savages commenced their attack. The battle was a long and fierce one, and resulted in the killing of a great number of savages. But finally they were driven off.

The next day Doctor Clark had tents and camp utensils taken ashore and the whole party occupied them.

In the afternoon Tom started on a short tour of the island, and had proceeded but a short distance when he was suddenly confronted by a large, hairy creature, walking like a man.

Tom raised his rifle and was going to fire when the creature opened his mouth and spoke in plain English: "Do not fire; I am a friend. Praise God! I again look upon a person from civilization!"

"Do you live here?"

"For some years I have been able to drag out a miserable existence here."

"Would you like to accompany me back to our camp?"

"Such is my wish, monsieur."

"Very well. We will return immediately."

They set out, and when they reached the camp the first person they saw was Marie, and at sight of her the man whom Tom had brought back to camp with him grew very much excited, and exclaimed:

"Is it possible that I behold Bettie de Castlemain?"

"Bettie is my mother's name," she replied; "my name is Marie. Do you know my mother?"

"You are the very image of your mother as she was when I last beheld her, and for a moment I forgot the years that have passed since that time. I am your Uncle Henri."

"Father, mother and myself came to Africa to search for you; would to God they were here to meet you now."

"Your father and mother, do they yet live?"

"Alas! I know not and scarcely dare hope that they do," answered Marie, who then told about the capture of her parents.

Henri de Castlemain listened intently to the narrative, and then inquired what month, and day of the month it was; after receiving the desired information he said:

"I have long ago ceased to keep any account of dates. Cheer up, Marie; if your parents have not died from natural causes they are yet alive. I once lived with the tribe who have them captive, and know their habits and customs well. They only offer up human sacrifices at stated periods, and before the next occasion upon which they will do so arrives the prisoners may be rescued."

The sun had now set; supper was announced and after it was eaten every one not on duty gathered around a large camp-fire in front of Captain Parker's tent.

Doctor Clark asked Henri de Castlemain to relate what had befallen him since he came to Africa.

He was about to comply when one of the sentinels fired and immediately afterward a gigantic figure, the upper part of which was of a light color, and the lower part dark, rushed from among the trees, tumbled into the fire, sent the brands flying in every direction and left everything in total darkness.

Those that were around the camp-fire scattered in every direction.

The creature that extinguished the fire could be heard pitching and tumbling about, uttering roars that sounded like muffled thunder, and from time to time it seemed as if the trees were violently struck with some wooden object.

Those who were around were afraid to fire lest they might hit some of their friends in the dark.

After some minutes of suspense and uncertainty, lights were procured and the cause of the disturbance discovered to be a full-grown male gorilla, with his body and arms tightly wedged into a molasses barrel.

Doctor Clark forbade every one from firing, and ordered some of the sailors to secure the animal, which they readily did, as it was so confined that it was well nigh powerless.

It was Doctor Clark's custom to collect curiosities of all kinds, and he was delighted at securing the gorilla, which he said was the only full-grown one that had ever been captured alive and unhurt.

The barrel, which had been nearly emptied on shipboard, was brought ashore with other supplies; after the molasses was used up the top was removed so that the sugar deposited in the barrel could be taken out and the empty vessel rolled out of the encampment.

The gorilla, while prowling around, came across the barrel, and, being like all of its species, fond of sweet things, attempted to lick the inside of the cask and got fastened in it.

The animal, while endeavoring to extricate himself, alarmed the sentinel, who fired.

Frightened by the report of the gun, and unable to see, the gorilla rushed madly forward until he tripped and fell into the fire, which he extinguished by his frantic efforts to regain his feet and escape.

After the excitement caused by this incident had subsided, Henri de Castlemain was again requested to relate his adventures, which he did as follows:

"I am the youngest son of Count Christian de Castlemain, of Normandy, who was one of the wealthiest and proudest in France. My parents had only two children, my brother Robert and myself. When our education was completed and we were respectively twenty-one and twenty years of age, it was determined that we should travel. After visiting the countries of the Old World we went to the United States, and there something occurred which colored the whole of our future lives.

"My brother fell in love with Miss Bettie Baltzelitz, the belle of Baltimore, married her without communicating with his parents, and a few days afterward we sailed for France. Having good reason to believe that our father would be very much offended at the step he had taken, my brother stopped in Paris and I went home to break the intelligence to our parents. My father was so much enraged when he heard of the marriage that he swore he would at once take legal steps to disinherit my brother and make me his heir and successor.

"Knowing that it was useless to expostulate with my father I took the only means open to me to prevent him from carrying out his intention. I entered the church, joined a party of missionaries and a few days afterward sailed for Africa, leaving letters addressed to my parents and brother, informing them of what I had done.

"After a long but uneventful voyage we landed on the coast of Africa, and after wandering about a while, established ourselves at Banjoce, the principal town of the Banogas (they of the serpent), a tribe of the Bechuanas. The natives be-

lieve all white men to be great hunters and magicians, so Monka, king of the Banogas, treated us very well at first, though we afterward found out that he was a bloodthirsty and treacherous savage.

"The town of Banjoce is situated on the edge of a large plain, a portion of which is cultivated by the tribe, and their cattle graze upon the rest. To the north of the town and overshadowing it is a mountain, towering to a height of some two thousand feet; its summit is inaccessible, save by a narrow and precipitous pathway, leading up its side in a zig-zag course. On every other side there are precipices which cannot be scaled by the foot of man. The top of the mountain is a plateau containing about five hundred acres covered with luxuriant vegetation, and on it is a small lake, fed by springs, which gush forth from among the rocks."

"Did the lake ever go dry?" inquired Abdallah, who had listened to this part of the narrative with intense interest.

"Never," replied Henri de Castlemain; "the natives had a superstition that if it did so their tribe would be destroyed. But why do you ask?"

"Because the town and mountain formerly belonged to my father's tribe and we believe that our future will be greatly affected by the condition of the lake."

This remark of Abdallah's excited a good deal of curiosity, but he declined to give any explanation, and Henri de Castlemain resumed his narrative.

"On the top of the mountain the natives kept their valuables and stored their provisions; during the maska (wet) season, and in time of war, they took everything up to the plateau and lived there; for so great is the natural strength of the place that a handful of men could hold it against a host.

"To the south of the mountain, distant only about half a mile, rises another, which is volcanic and occasionally sends forth smoke, flame and melted lava.

"The natives call this mountain Hory Mountain, that is the Devil's Mountain, and regard it with superstitious dread; they told many horrible tales about it, and their terror during an eruption was extreme. After we had been with the Banogas about six years there was a terrible drought, which continued for a long time. Everything in the way of vegetation was dried up by the intense heat, the crops would not grow, and the tribe was reduced to great extremity for want of food. The wizards and rain-makers, who are bitterly opposed to missionaries, took advantage of the opportunity to influence the minds of the natives against us.

"One day when I was returning from a solitary hunting expedition, I was met by a man whose life I had once saved, who told me that my companions had been put to death, and men were then out looking for me. While he was speaking I saw a number of warriors stealthily approaching; I fled for my life. With extreme difficulty I escaped from my savage pursuers, and finally concealed myself on the mountain where Monsieur Gale found me to-day. The guanioniens, or leopards of the air, contrary to their usual habits, congregate in numbers and build their nests among the rocks on the summit of the mountain. "I captured the young birds, and with extreme difficulty tamed them; then I taught them to hunt, or rather bring their game to me, by the same means that the Chinese adopt to make the cormorant fish for them.

"This is done by putting rings around the birds' necks, which effectually prevents them from swallowing; thus they were forced to bring their prey to me. After securing such parts of the captured animals as I wanted, I removed the rings and let them eat. For years past these birds have supplied me with all the meat that I needed; the rest of my fare consisted of such fruit and nuts as grow wild in the woods.

"The mountain is so difficult to scale that I have never been molested by the natives, and with the exception of occasional

encounters with wild animals my life has been uneventful. I had long since abandoned all hope of returning to civilized life, and to-day is the first time I have gazed on the face of a white man for ten years."

"You have indeed had a strange experience," said Captain Parker, "and I think you may very properly be called the king of the eagles."

"What plan do you recommend for the rescue of your brother and his companions?" inquired Doctor Clark.

"I advise you to take every available man you can muster, and move at once," replied Henri de Castlemain. "I can guide you, and if we are cautious we may surprise the savages before they can take refuge in their stronghold on the mountain."

"No time shall be lost," answered Doctor Clark; "we will immediately prepare to march."

After a little more conversation about the savages, and difficulties of the proposed expedition, the party separated for the night.

As Tom and Mike were going to their tent a huge lion, uttering an appalling roar, sprang out of a patch of high grass, seized Mike, and dashed into a thicket with him before any one could interfere.

Determining to rescue his friend or perish with him, Tom drew his revolver and without a moment's hesitation rushed into the bushes, where the ferocious animal could be heard growling savagely as if it were tearing its victim to pieces.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT OF THE LION'S JAWS—THE EXPEDITION STARTS.

Tom had only advanced a few steps into the bushes when he saw the eyes of the lion glowing like balls of fire.

It was too dark to distinguish objects on the ground, and Tom hesitated about shooting, for he thought there was as good a chance of hitting Mike as the lion.

Some one hurled a piece of blazing wood into the thicket, and by its light Tom saw the lion crouch as if to spring on him.

"A light—a light! For God's sake, bring a light!" yelled Tom.

He had scarcely ceased speaking when there was a bright flash, a sharp report, a deep growl, and then a gasping, bubbling sound was heard as of an animal stifling in its own blood.

"Ha! Who fired that shot?"

"Be jabers an' it was meself!" shouted Mike, in the darkness, "an' it's dead I've killed him, but he's mashin' ther breath clane out av me body."

The unexpected but welcome sound of Mike's voice was answered by his friends with a cheer.

There was a general rush into the bushes, and by the light of some torches which had now been brought, Mike was discovered lying flat upon his back with the dead lion on top of him.

He was quickly extricated from his unpleasant position, and Tom, grasping his hand, exclaimed:

"Mike, old fellow, I was afraid I would never see you alive again; are you hurt much?"

"Sure, an' me left shoulder is bit off entirely," replied Mike.

"Let me see it," said Doctor Clark, who helped Mike get off his coat and examined his shoulder, which was found to be somewhat bruised, but neither the skin nor any of the bones were broken. "You will be all right in a day or so; the lion must be an old one or you would not have escaped so easily."

Tom pushed open the lion's mouth with a stick and showed

that the doctor was right about the animal's age, for he had only four huge, blunt, yellow fangs left.

"It was, nevertheless, a very narrow escape," remarked Captain Parker; "you were lucky in having your pistol and presence of mind to use it."

"When he grabbed me," replied Mike, "an' took me off, for all the woruld as a cat does a mouse, I thought to meself that he'd ate me alive in no time; whin ther baste got into ther bushes he squatted on top av me an' took me neck an' ther lower part av me face in his mouth, but just as I felt his teeth a-closin' onto me, some one kim crashin' into ther thicket an'——"

"That was Tom," said the captain, interrupting him.

"An' it's me life he saved by comin'," replied Mike; "or as I was saying, ther lion let go his howlt, raised off av me an' crouched as if he wor goin' ter jump; thin I remimbered me pistol, clapped it against ther baste where I felt his heart batin', an' fired, when down he dhropped on top av me, an' it was into a jelly I thought I wor mashed."

The lion was skinned, his carcass thrown outside of the encampment, and every one, except the guard, retired to rest.

The next morning preparations were commenced for the expedition to rescue Count de Castlemain and his companions.

Some of Abdallah's friends, who were rescued when the Harpy was captured, were sent into the interior to collect the warriors of their tribe and to employ porters.

An abundance of goods suitable for presents to chiefs, and to trade with the natives, were found on board of the Harpy.

By advice of Henri de Castlemain a large quantity of these things were selected to be used in propitiating the tribes through whose territory it would be necessary to pass.

While the men, under the direction of the inferior officers, were engaged in putting up the provisions, etc., Doctor Clark and Captain Parker took observations and consulted books and charts to ascertain what river the ships were in.

They finally determined that it was the river Cunene, about the existence of which there has been much dispute.

Many years ago a French frigate discovered the embouchure of a magnificent river between the seventeenth and eighteenth degrees of south latitude. Other vessels were sent out to explore it and to ascertain its course, but strange to say they searched for it in vain.

Subsequently the masters of several merchant vessels reported that they had seen the mouth of the river, but their statements were doubted.

Henri de Castlemain said that the entrance of the river had been open several times while he was living on the mountain, and the natives believed that when its mouth was closed by sand banks the water found its way to the sea by a subterraneous course.

But Dr. Clark was of the opinion that when the river was dammed up by the sand, that the water flowed back through the branches of the stream and was lost in the desert sands, or emptied into the low, flat lakes in the interior of the country.

Dr. Clark's supposition about the river was afterward ascertained to be correct, and as will be seen in the course of this narrative it was fortunate for the expedition that such was the case.

The leopards of the air had done Henri de Castlemain such good service that he returned to the mountain top, removed the rings from their necks and let them all go, with the exception of twelve, which were secured for Dr. Clark's collection.

Early in the morning of the third day, after preparations for the march had been commenced, Tom, Mike and Abdallah, with some of the Seedeas, went up the river to shoot hippopotamuses for the natives who were expected to arrive that day.

There were an abundance of these huge animals in the river, and in a few hours ten of them were killed, towed down and moored to the low, shelving bank a short distance above the camp.

In the afternoon Abdallah's messengers returned with Umvo, King of the Batans, accompanied by over four hundred warriors and some two hundred men and women to act as porters.

The Batan warriors were a wild-looking but splendid set of men, armed with assegais, bows, shields, knobkerries and knives.

Umvo, their king, a man of gigantic stature, was at first suspicious that Abdallah designed to supersede him, but as soon as his mind was disabused of this idea they rubbed their noses together and became very friendly.

As for the warriors and porters, Abdallah won their hearts completely, when, by Dr. Clark's direction, he led them to where the hippopotamuses were lying in the shallow water and told them to help themselves.

Then ensued an indescribable scene of confusion. The savages rushed into the water and commenced hacking and cutting the animals with assegais, knives and hatchets, hallooing, yelling, shoving and fighting until the huge hippopotamuses were cut up and every atom of the flesh appropriated.

Fires were at once kindled and the savages commenced feasting, and kept it up nearly all night.

The sailors had worked like beavers, but so many things were found to be done at the last moment that the expedition did not start until the next afternoon.

Young as he was, Tom had given such proofs of possessing mature judgment, strategic ability and unflinching courage, that he was placed in command, while Mike was given the second rank.

Abdallah and Umvo commanded the Seedeas and negro warriors, but received their orders from Tom.

Dr. Clark accompanied the expedition as surgeon and general adviser.

Captain Parker would have commanded, but the preservation of the ships was of such vital importance that the captain reluctantly admitted that he had better remain with them. Little Orlando was left with him.

But Marie de Castlemain was so anxious about her parents that Doctor Clark, after much persuasion, consented that she and Louise Ashton might accompany the expedition.

Two of the horses procured at the Cape of Good Hope were appropriated to their use; side saddles were found among the plunder on board of the Harpy, and both of the girls had nice riding-habits in their trunks, which were transferred to that vessel from the L'Orient.

Doctor Clark and Henri de Castlemain rode on one of the elephants which were brought from India, and there was room enough in the howdah for the two girls if they grew tired of horseback riding.

At length everything was ready and the little army, composed of sailors, Seedeas, Batan warriors and porters, numbering between seven and eight hundred, made quite an imposing appearance when arranged on the sandy beach.

Mounted on a fiery black horse, Tom dashed along the line to see that everything was all right; then spurring to the front directed Ben Spears to unfurl the flag, and in a clear, ringing voice said:

"Attention! Column forward! March!"

The men cheered; the bugles sounded; salutes were fired from the Falcon and Harpy, and before the reverberations of the heavy guns died away the head of the column plunged into the forest and the expedition had started on its desperate enterprise.

CHAPTER XV.

LOST IN THE DESERT.

Climbing mountains, crossing rivers and forcing their way through pathless forests, the expedition moved forward for five days.

Then they came to the edge of a desert that spread out before them like an ocean of sand, sparkling and glancing in the torrid sunshine.

Here it was determined to halt for some days to lay in a stock of meat and let the men and animals recruit their strength. For Henri de Castlemain announced that it would require three days to cross the desert, during which neither game nor water could be found.

The sailors and natives had a grand hunt; an immense quantity of game was killed and all of the men were set to work cutting the meat into strips and drying it so that it would keep.

Taking advantage of the halt the Indian mahouts captured four elephants, three cows and an immense bull.

The female elephants soon became tractable, but the bull remained savage, and had to be constantly watched to prevent him from doing damage.

While the men were engaged in preparing the meat, Tom and Mike, with the two girls, made many short excursions into the grand old forest around where they were encamped.

One day when they were cantering along in the edge of the woods two large male ostriches jumped up in front of them and started off into the desert.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom. "Let us run them down and get some plumes."

His companions answered with a cheer, and the next moment the whole party dashed off in pursuit of the birds.

On finding that they were followed the ostriches separated, one going off at nearly a right angle from the other; Mike and Louise Ashton pursued the former, while Tom and Marie kept on after the latter.

Mike had only gone a short distance when his horse put its foot into a hole, fell, and sent him flying like a rocket over its head.

Falling on the soft sand, Mike was not hurt; he sprang to his feet, unslung his rifle from his back and fired a shot which bowled over the ostrich as dead as a rock at a distance of a hundred and fifty yards.

In the meantime Tom and Marie were flying along in pursuit of the other ostrich.

Onward scoured the ostrich, swift as the wind, and Tom and Marie swept after him like pursuing eagles.

The yellow sand flew from beneath the hoofs of the horses as with flashing eyes, stretched necks, and open nostrils, drinking the air, they strained onward in the mad chase, as if animated by the spirit of their riders.

Mile after mile was passed at a racing pace, and yet the gigantic stride of the huge bird enabled it to maintain its lead.

At length just as Tom began to think of abandoning the chase the ostrich commenced to shorten its steps and run first to one side and then to the other.

Tom and Marie now gained rapidly on the ostrich, but it dodged about for some time before Tom could get near enough to bring it down with his revolver.

As soon as the excitement of the chase was over Tom reproached himself for cruelty in pressing the spirited horse so severely, and, in fact, their appearance rather frightened him, for their heaving flanks, tottering forelegs and quivering tails showed that they were very much distressed.

Dismounting and assisting Marie to do the same, Tom loosened the girths and turned the animals' heads to the wind.

After plucking the long feathers from the wings of the ostrich, Tom looked around and found that the woods were out of sight; this would not have been the case had the desert been level, but its surface was undulating and in some places quite rough and broken.

In the excitement of the pursuit, while following the ostrich in its devious course, Tom lost all idea of the direction from whence he came.

As soon as the horses were rested he and Marie mounted and started to trace their way back by the animals' hoof prints.

They had not gone far before they saw a dust-cloud a long way in front of them.

The cloud was small at first, but it soon spread along as far as the eye could see, and grew denser and denser.

Sometimes the dark, angry-looking mass rushed on with the speed of thought, sometimes it moved slowly, wreathing the sand into fantastic columns.

Tom reined in his horse and checked Marie's steed; he knew that they were about to encounter the deadly whirlwind of the desert, and did not know how to act.

Weighed down by an overpowering sense of their helplessness, he and Marie for a few moments sat mute and motionless, watching the army of sand-pillars as they came circling onward.

Then, as if actuated by the same thought, Tom and Marie wheeled their horses and urged them into a wild gallop.

On—on dashed the panting horses, but swifter far the fierce wind whirled the chaotic masses of sand forward.

A scorching blast which preceded the moving sand first overtook Tom and Marie; then they heard a fierce, deafening, hissing noise as of a torrent falling on molten metal.

The horses stopped as if paralyzed, and buried their noses in the loose soil. Then Tom and Marie dismounted and instinctively fell prostrate with their faces downward.

The next moment a deluge of sand swept over them, penetrating their garments, burning like sparks of fire and nearly stifling them.

It was but little over a minute, but it seemed an eternity before it passed.

Weak and languid, Tom and Marie arose to their feet; the fine sand had forced itself into their mouths and noses, and their lips felt as if they were blistered.

The whirlwind was sweeping onward in the distance; no further danger was to be apprehended from it, but the drifting sand had effaced the tracks which would have served to guide Tom and Marie back to their friends.

Around them on every side stretched away to the horizon's verge the bare, burning sands unmarked by a single trace. They were lost in the desert.

Brave as he was, Tom's heart sank within him at the prospect before them; but he spoke cheering words to Marie, assisted her to mount, and they started off at a venture.

The horses had lost their fire and animation; they moved along with lowering heads and drooping ears, at a snail's pace.

Tom scanned the ground closely on every side as they proceeded, in hopes of finding the ostrich, in which event he intended to secure a portion of its flesh for food; but his search was in vain. Nor did he see a spot which he remembered to have passed before.

Late in the afternoon, happening to find a low rock, which, standing on the edge of a declivity, cast a little shadow, Tom and Marie dismounted and rested in the scanty shade.

As soon as the sun had set they started again; there was no moon, but they were too anxious to sleep, and traveled all night by the light of the stars.

But as it happened, they had much better have rested, for they moved in a circle, and the next morning found themselves at the same rock where they had rested the evening before.

Tom was very much disheartened by this circumstance, but

he knew that it would not do to relax their efforts, for if some relief were not speedily procured he and Marie would both perish from absolute want.

The horses were almost completely worn out and seemed ready at every step to fall down from exhaustion, but they were made to toil on.

Weak and faint with hunger and suffering from intense thirst which shrivelled their lips and parched their throats so that they could scarcely speak, Tom and Marie felt as if it would be a relief to lie down and die.

But the brave girl never uttered a word of complaint. Tom was lost in admiration at her fortitude, and reproached himself a thousand times for exposing her to so much suffering and danger.

At last, after many hours of slow and painful progress, Tom discerned a dark speck on the horizon; as they advanced it grew larger. It was the forest on the edge of the desert.

The sight revived the drooping spirits of Tom and Marie, for they thought that they saw the spot, though distant, which would afford them relief.

But many weary miles lay between them and the wished-for goal, and darkness overtook them ere it was reached.

But still they kept on, nor did the horses evince any disposition to stop; they seemed to feel that they were approaching a place of safety, and made fresh efforts to reach it.

After what seemed an interminable period, the dark trees loomed up before them, and in a few minutes they were beneath the wide spreading branches.

"Thank God—thank God! we are saved!" exclaimed Marie fervently.

Tom did not say anything to discourage her, but his mind was filled with forebodings that water might not be found, and if it were not, both they and the horses must soon perish.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARIE IS CARRIED OFF BY A GORILLA.

It was so dark in the forest that Tom thought the search for water would have to be postponed until morning.

But instinct is a surer guide than reason. The horses, instead of stopping when the reins were dropped on their necks, diverged a little from the original direction, pricked up their ears and moved forward more briskly.

In a short time water, which they so much needed, was seen gleaming before them; the next minute Tom and Marie, throwing themselves from their steeds, knelt down upon its margin and quenched their thirst; the horses wading in up to their saddle-girths, drank as if they would burst themselves.

After resting a little while Tom struck a match and started a fire to keep away the wild animals.

While gathering fuel he found lying on the ground, where it had fallen from the trees, some wild fruit called clappers, of a kind he had several times eaten on the march.

Collecting a quantity of the fruit, which was about three times the size of an orange, and had a hard shell on the outside, Tom and Marie made a hearty lunch.

They found themselves in a grove of noble trees, on the bank of a clear lake of considerable size.

Soon after awakening, Tom saw near at hand a splendid crest-peaw, or bustard; raising his rifle he fired; the bird, though severely wounded, managed to take wing, but fell near the end of a long, narrow tongue of land, which extended some distance into the lake.

While looking for the bird in the tall grass, which reached far above his head and was as dry as tinder, except immediately along the water's edge, Tom found a canoe and paddle

that had evidently long been abandoned, but were still serviceable.

At length he stumbled on the bustard, carried it to the fire, cleaned and roasted it, and he and Marie ate a hearty meal.

Knowing that their friends would search for them, and that the natives could follow a trail like a bloodhound, Tom determined to remain where they were for some days at least.

He at once set to work with a hatchet, which he carried tied to his saddle, to make a shelter of green boughs, intending to thatch it with leaves.

While thus engaged he caught a glimpse of a bushbuck feeding at no great distance from him.

Telling Marie to stay where she was, Tom seized his rifle and went in pursuit of the animal.

The bushbuck was very shy, and Tom had to follow it and creep about among the trees for nearly two hours before he was able to shoot it.

After disembowelling the buck Tom threw it across his shoulders and returned to where he had left Marie.

She had disappeared.

He called her, but she did not answer.

He shouted at the top of his voice, but the sound died away in hollow echoes and there was no response.

Seriously alarmed, Tom began to search for some trace of the missing girl.

At length he saw some footprints on the sandy soil; he supposed that they were those of savages, but was struck by the immense size of the impress of the big toes.

It at once flashed through Tom's mind that Marie had been surprised and carried off by the savages.

Almost frantic with anxiety he started to follow the tracks, intending to rescue her or perish in the attempt.

The trail led toward the tongue of land which extended into the lake.

While rapidly but carefully picking his way through the undergrowth, with every sense on the alert, Tom heard a hoarse murmuring sound, occasionally mingled with tones of voices apparently raised in anger or dispute.

Cautiously pushing the bushes aside he crept forward until he got a view of those from whom the noises proceeded.

Merciful heavens! what a sight met his gaze, causing his heart to grow faint within him and making him doubt for an instant if it was not a horrible dream, rather than reality.

In front of him towered an immense baobab tree at least forty feet in diameter, among whose branches were some thirty gorillas, with one or two exceptions, full grown. They were in a state of the wildest excitement, moving about among the limbs and up and down the tree constantly.

The cause of their excitement was at once apparent.

Standing in the entrance of a cavernous opening in the huge trunk, about a hundred and fifty feet from the ground, was an enormous gorilla, by far the largest of the troop; his left arm encircled and supported Marie, while in his right paw he held a club with which he repulsed the attempts of the other gorillas to approach his prize, keeping up at the same time an angry, growling noise.

And Marie, was she dead or alive? Tom scarcely dared hope that she was alive; better, he thought in his agony, would it be for him to put a bullet through her heart than to let her be exposed to the horrid brutality of those savage animals.

Her head reclined on the huge, hairy arm of the gorilla, her long, silken hair fell in a mass of dishevelled gold adown her person and over the body of the beast.

Her face was upturned toward Tom, but her eyes were closed, and he could not tell whether she was dead or in a swoon; he was unable to detect any marks of violence on her arms or face, nor was there any blood visible on her dress.

Resting his rifle on the limb of a low, thick bush, behind which he crouched, Tom drew a bead on the head of the

gorilla; his tremor had departed, and nerved with the firmness of desperation his hand was as steady as a rock.

With his finger on the trigger he hesitated; for he thought that if the gorilla should be killed and tumbled from his dizzy elevation, the fall would be fatal to Marie; or might he not miss his aim and slay her, or perhaps merely wound the gorilla, who would tear her to pieces in his rage.

While he thus deliberated the gorillas on the limbs, emboldened by their numbers and enraged by the repeated repulses they had met with, seemed determined to simultaneously assail the one having possession of Marie and rend her from him.

They surrounded the opening in which he stood, on every side, and, reaching with their long arms, endeavored to seize the coveted object and pluck her from her possessor.

Thus beset and encumbered by her weight, Marie's captor bestirred himself with wondrous activity and quickness, his club swept around in rapid circles and for a time kept his assailants at a respectful distance.

At length one of the gorillas, taking advantage of a moment when the attention of the large one was attracted by another, darted from one side, made a clutch at Marie and tore away a large piece of her dress, with which he ran, chattering, up the tree.

The gorilla that held Marie was terribly enraged; the little tuft of hair on his head was erect and bristling, his fiery eyes shot forth angry gleams, he champed his fierce-looking teeth like a wild boar, and ever and anon uttered a deep roar, which sounded like thunder.

The contest continued for some minutes—ages they seemed to Tom—then the large gorilla, beside himself with rage, threw away his club and slid his paw toward Marie's neck, evidently determined to destroy the unconscious cause of his annoyance. One grasp of those nervous fingers and huge thumb, and the poor girl would be no more.

Quick as the animal's motion was it was not as quick as Tom's comprehending the fell intent. He pressed the trigger of his rifle.

There was a flash, a sharp report, and Tom's view was momentarily obstructed by the smoke that filled the small opening in the foliage through which he fired. When it cleared away Marie, and the gorilla holding her, had vanished.

CHAPTER XVII.

TOM KILLS A TROOP OF GORILLAS AND FINDS MARIE.

A dead silence followed the report of Tom's gun.

The noisy cries of the gorillas were hushed and they remained motionless in the attitudes they were at the time as if they had been petrified.

But where were Marie and her captor?

It was not probable that they had fallen on the outside of the tree, for Tom did not hear them strike the ground.

Nor was it at all likely that the gorilla, encumbered as he was, could have passed around the tree or ascended it and concealed himself among the branches during the short time Tom's view was obstructed by smoke.

Tom's mind was filled with dreadful surmises.

It occurred to him that Marie and the gorilla holding her had fallen back into the opening which probably connected with a hollow in the tree.

If the hollow in the tree extended to the ground the fall would be fatal to Marie, but if she should escape death from that cause perhaps the savage animal was only wounded and might at that very time be tearing her tender limbs with his huge paws and mangling her snowy neck and sweet face with

his horrid teeth. There was agony beyond mention in the thought.

However, Tom had but scant time to indulge in gloomy thoughts. The inactivity of the gorillas was very brief; recovering from their surprise they uttered hoarse roars and their fiery little eyes roved about everywhere in search of the cause of the interruption.

In the meantime Tom had slipped another cartridge into his breech-loading rifle; he took aim at a male gorilla which stood erect on the stump of a limb, and sent a bullet through his heart; the animal made a convulsive leap and came crashing down, spattering the limbs with his blood.

The shot discovered Tom to the gorillas; uttering cries of rage they commenced to descend the tree with great celerity.

Only pausing long enough to fire one more shot, which brought down another gorilla, Tom retreated and by chance went toward the lake.

The gorillas followed him and almost before he knew it Tom found himself upon the tongue of land extending into the lake, and his pursuers were closing in upon him.

Facing about, Tom threw his rifle to his shoulder and bowled over the foremost gorilla; the rest of the troop assuming erect attitudes, advanced toward him walking upon their hind feet and beating upon their broad breasts with their fists, producing a noise like that of bass drums. A more horrible-looking drum corps could not be imagined.

But Tom had no idea of waiting until the savage animals were near enough to spring on him; the moment after he fired he turned and plunged into the tall, dry grass, which reached far above his head.

As he tore along the loud rustling of the grass warned him that the gorillas were rapidly gaining on him.

He strained every nerve and at length reached the canoe which he had found that morning, pushed it into the water, jumped in and shoved off just in time to avoid a gorilla that burst through the grass, and made a grab at the boat as it parted from the shore.

The angry roars that the animal uttered at seeing his prey escape, speedily collected the others around him.

They followed Tom along the shore, but did not attempt to overtake him by swimming, for the gorilla does not take to the water willingly.

Paddling down to the end of the point of land Tom shot around it and then being concealed from the gorillas by the tall grass, pulled swiftly for the mainland.

On reaching it he jumped out of the canoe, jerked out his match-box, passed rapidly across the tongue of land where it joined the shore, and fired the grass in a dozen places.

A stiff breeze was blowing toward the lake and the grass was dry as tinder; almost instantaneously the blaze shot up, ten—fifteen—twenty feet high, and driven by the wind, swept down upon the doomed gorillas, a roaring whirlwind of flame.

“At once there rose so wild a yell,
As all the fiends from heaven that fell,
Had pealed the banner-cry of hell!”

Almost in as little time as it takes to tell of it the fire reached the end of the land and died out for want of fuel.

But in that brief period the flames did their work completely. The tongue of land lately covered with a dense mass of vegetation was swept bare as the palm of your hand, and the troop of gorillas, overtaken by the fierce fire, were all destroyed except three, which being near the water's edge, sprang into the lake and endeavored to escape by swimming.

This they would no doubt have accomplished but Tom did not think it safe to let them come ashore, and fired on them until the last of the savage animals, sank.

Tom then hastened back to the baobab tree, paused at the foot of it and listened.

No sound was heard save the whispering of the wind through the forest.

As Tom stood looking up, a large drop of blood fell on his face.

Scanning the tree closely to see where it came from, he saw a thin stream of the same crimson fluid flowing out of the opening in the trunk and trickling down on the rough, gray bark.

Tom now began to rack his brains to devise some way of ascending the tree.

The first idea that occurred to him was to cut steps with his hatchet in the bark which he knew, on a baobab tree of that size, was from twelve to fourteen inches thick.

But while walking around the tree and examining it carefully he found on the other side of the immense trunk some wooden pegs which had been driven into the thick bark so as to form a rude kind of ladder.

The pegs were evidently very old and began to show signs of decay, but Tom, without a moment's hesitation, began to ascend, leaving his rifle on the ground, for he did not think it advisable to carry any unnecessary weight.

The pegs were not placed one above another in a perpendicular line, but went around the tree in a spiral direction.

Cautiously and with considerable difficulty, climbing the frail ladder, Tom at last found himself at the entrance of the opening in the trunk of the tree, where the gorilla stood holding Marie when he was shot.

Tom looked into the aperture, but it was so dark inside that he could not see anything.

He felt for his matches, but the box was not in his pocket, and he supposed that he had dropped it while setting fire to the grass.

First making sure that his pistol and knife were ready for immediate use, Tom crept into the hole and advanced on his hands and knees, carefully feeling his way.

A few feet from the entrance of the opening it was dark as midnight and silent as the tomb.

After advancing over an almost level surface for some four yards, Tom's head came in contact with some object that felt hairy.

Quick as lightning Tom drew his revolver and knife so as to be ready if attacked, for he did not know but what the gorilla might seize him the next instant.

There were a few moments of breathless suspense, but nothing stirred, and then Tom, placing his knife between his teeth and holding his pistol ready to fire at a moment's notice, felt the object his hand had encountered.

It was one of the gorilla's feet; Tom pulled it, but the animal did not move; he was evidently dead.

Being now relieved of all apprehension of danger from the gorilla, Tom replaced the knife and pistol in his belt and felt about for Marie.

He found her lying by the side of the gorilla, encircled by one of the dead monster's huge arms.

She did not answer when Tom spoke, and his sense of touch told him that her face and dress were wet with blood.

“Great God!” he exclaimed, “she must be dead!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE HOUSE—THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR—ATTACKED BY SAVAGES.

Tom's heart sank in his bosom like a lump of lead. He believed that Marie was dead, and the pangs which tore

his breast told him that he loved her with all the strength of his strong, ardent nature.

But Tom was emphatically a boy of action, and in nowise disposed to yield to grief or despondency.

With some difficulty he unclasped the gorilla's arm from around Marie, and carried her to the entrance of the opening where it was light.

Her dress was saturated with blood, and one side of her face was bloody, but Tom could not find any wound.

He felt her heart and to his intense joy and surprise found that it was beating faintly, it was true, but unmistakably beating.

Hope sprang anew in Tom's bosom. Holding Marie in his arms he chafed her hands and forehead, and at length she uttered a deep sigh and opened her eyes.

There was a scared look on her face at first, but it disappeared when she saw who was holding her.

"Don't be afraid, Marie," said Tom, "you are safe."

"Thank God!" she ejaculated.

"Do you suffer much?"

"Suffer? Oh, no; I do not feel any pain."

"Is it possible? Are you hurt at all?"

"I don't know, but I think not," she said, withdrawing herself from Tom's arms and sitting up. "See, I can sit up very well, though I feel quite weak and faint."

"Then I had better get you some water, but I hardly know how I am to bring it up the tree."

"Up the tree; what do you mean?"

"Didn't you know that you were up in a tree? Look out."

Marie did so and shrank back, asking:

"Why, how did I get up here?"

"The gorilla brought you up."

"Was it a gorilla?"

"Yes; how did he happen to catch you?"

"I was sitting by a tree, looking at some flowers I had gathered when a great hairy creature sprang out of the bushes and seized me; then I must have fainted, for I do not remember anything that happened until I became conscious that you were holding me."

"I would like to see if there is anything alive in this hollow, before I go after the water," said Tom, searching in his pocket for matches.

He found the box, which had slipped down in the lining of his coat.

Striking a light he and Marie went back to where the dead gorilla was.

The hairy monster lay extended at full length in a pool of his own blood; he was shot through the head and had evidently staggered back and fallen dead.

Tom had scarcely noticed these facts when the match burned out; he struck another and by its light discovered that they were in a room which had been hollowed out in the tree by the hand of man.

Some splinters of resinous wood lay piled against the wall on the floor; lighting one of them, which made an excellent torch, Tom and Marie examined the strange chamber.

It was of an irregular oval shape, about eleven feet long and eight wide; it had evidently been used as a habitation, for the floor was littered with bones and several old calabashes, and two or three rude earthenware vessels were scattered about.

"This is a strange place for any one to live in," said Marie.

"I think this would be a safe place to stay in if there was a door."

"I'll contrive a way to close the entrance," replied Tom.

"But how will I ever get down?"

"Oh, there will be no trouble about that, but you had better remain up here until our friends come."

"Do you think they can find us?"

"Certainly; but in the meantime we must eat so I'll go down and cook some venison."

Tom descended the tree, carrying two calabashes with him, built a fire, sharpened a stick at both ends, on one of which he spitted a quarter of the bush-buck and stuck the other in the ground near the fire.

While the meat was roasting Tom filled the calabashes with water, and Marie drew them up with the vine and emptied them into the earthenware vessels until they and the gourds were all full.

After the meat was cooked Marie drew it up; then Tom ascended, hauled up the rest of the bush-buck and hung it on one of the pegs near the entrance of the aperture.

Tom and Marie then seated themselves in the entrance of their strange dwelling and eat their dinner.

And they both thought that the meal, simple as it was, but seasoned by a sense of safety, was far sweeter than any delicacy they had ever tasted.

After dinner Tom went down to the ground and collected a large bundle of dry grass, out of which he made a couch for Marie in the chamber and one for himself near the entrance.

A short time after he completed this the sun set and the air became vocal with the cries of nightbirds and the howls of wild animals.

For a long time Tom and Marie sat talking and looking out on the starlit sky and dark woods.

They felt as if they were cut off from the world, but did not feel lonely, for they were conscious that they were all the world to each other.

Yet there were no words to that effect spoken, for irresistibly as Tom felt drawn to his fair companion, he was too generous and considerate to make a declaration of love to a lady while she was dependent on him for protection.

At length Marie retired and Tom laid down at the entrance of the opening, but he could not sleep, and after a while he heard a scratching noise on the outside of the tree.

He stuck his head out and the green, fiery eyes of a large animal, which was not more than a yard below, glared into his.

Whipping out his pistol Tom clapped it against the head of the intruder and fired.

Uttering a terrific roar the animal sprang from the trunk of the tree far out into the air and fell, striking the ground with a loud crash.

"What is it—what is the matter?" cried Marie, who was awakened by the report of the pistol.

"Some kind of an animal was after the venison," replied Tom; "but I have killed it."

There was no interruption after this, and in a short time both Marie and Tom fell asleep.

The next morning Tom was awakened by the sun shining in his face.

He looked out and saw a large leopard lying dead near the foot of the tree, and the next moment caught sight of forty or fifty savages, with bows in their hands, advancing through the forest.

They were evidently following the trail made by the horses, and when they stopped at the foot of the tree and began to examine the leopard and gorilla, Tom, under the impression that they were some of the Batans in search of him, halloed to them.

The savages looked up, saw him, and the next instant drew their bows and let fly a shower of arrows, which Tom barely escaped by leaping back nimbly.

The arrows continued to pour into the opening for several minutes and then ceased.

Tom cocked his rifle, and, crouching down where the passage entered the room, watched the outside entrance.

Several minutes passed, during which he neither saw nor

heard anything; then he caught sight of the top of a woolly head and immediately drew a bead on it.

Slowly the head arose above the bottom of the entrance until the brutal face of a savage was revealed; then Tom pressed the trigger of his rifle.

There was a vivid flash of light, a report, which, in the confined space, sounded like thunder, and the savage, with a bullet hole through his brain, went whirling down from the dizzy elevation.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE SMOKE—A DEFEAT—STARTLING NEWS.

Everything was perfectly quiet for nearly an hour, so Tom crept toward the entrance on his hands and knees to reconnoitre.

Looking down he saw Abdallah with some of his men in hot pursuit of the savages, while Mike and a number of the Seedees were already engaged in scattering and extinguishing a fire which the savages had started at the foot of the tree.

Mike looked up, saw him, and shouted:

"Hurrah, old boy! Is it all right ye are? And where do ye kape ther steps?"

Tom made a motion with his hand which Mike understood; he ran around the tree, climbed up the pegs and in another minute was shaking hands like mad with Tom and Marie, who had now revived.

Explanations were soon given and received.

After killing the ostrich, Mike had gone back to camp with Louise Ashton, and as Tom and Marie did not return, after waiting a few hours, he started with Abdallah and the Seedees in search of them.

They at length found the trail, and while following it came in sight of the savages around the fire at the foot of the baobab tree; Abdallah knew at a glance what they were about, and attacked them at once.

Abdallah soon returned from pursuit of the savages and reported that fifteen of them were killed, but none of his men were hurt.

A rude but strong seat was made of green boughs, and in it, by means of a large vine, Marie was lowered to the ground in safety.

After a short halt, during which Tom showed Mike and Abdallah the gorillas which were destroyed by fire, and some of the Seedees skinned the leopard and large gorilla, Tom and Marie's horses were caught, and they started to rejoin their friends.

Abdallah had received minute directions from Dr. Clark as to the direction in which he would march, and calculated so well that before dark he guided the party to where the expedition had encamped for the night.

The safe return of Tom and Marie caused general rejoicing, and the story of their adventures excited no end of wonder.

The expedition was now within two days' journey of the principal village of Monka, king of the Banogas, where Count de Castlemain and his companions were imprisoned, and henceforth the march was conducted with great caution.

The men were ordered not to fire off their guns or stray from the line; flanking parties were thrown out and a large number of scouts sent in advance.

Late in the afternoon of the second day the column was halted on the bank of a considerable stream, at a point which Henri de Castlemain said was only a short distance from Banjoe, King Monka's principal village.

One of the sailors, while dipping up some water out of the stream, found a large sabot in an eddy, brought it to Dr. Clark and said:

"This was fired from one of the Falcon's guns."

"I recognize it," replied the doctor, "for it is of a peculiar kind which I had made; it was brought here by the current, and not only shows that the stream is a branch of the Cunene River, but proves that I was correct in my supposition that the river flowed back toward its source when it was dammed up at the mouth."

"You are no doubt right," said Henri de Castlemain; "this stream flows between the mountain on which King Monka's stronghold is and the volcano. I have observed that sometimes the current ran one way and sometimes the other, but could not imagine why it did so."

As soon as the camp was established it was left in charge of a small guard and Tom, Mike, Dr. Clark and Abdallah, with the rest of the force, moved forward under the guidance of Henri de Castlemain, to try and surprise King Monka in his village at the foot of the mountain.

Advancing cautiously until they reached the edge of the plain they halted under cover of the woods, about eight hundred yards from the village, while Tom and Dr. Clark examined the place with their fieldglasses.

The village was of considerable magnitude, and surrounded by a strong stockade; there were two gates, both of which were standing open.

One of the gates was at the back end of the village against the foot of the mountain, the other was in front and could only be approached between two parallel lines of stockades, which extended at least two hundred yards into the plain.

A number of savages were moving about in the village, or ascending and descending the mountain.

It was an ugly-looking place to attack, and as a surprise in the daytime was out of the question, Tom would have delayed making the assault until after dark if Henri de Castlemain had not expressed the opinion that the savages were then engaged in moving their things and would all be up on the mountain before nightfall.

So Tom at once made arrangements for the attack.

He directed Abdallah to take Umva and the Batan warriors and attack the village on one side, while he with the rest of the force assailed it on the other.

As soon as the two columns were formed Tom gave the order to advance.

The moment they emerged from the woods the savages in the village gave a shout and closed the gates.

Advancing at a quick step across the plain the men in the assaulting parties uttered a yell and rushed at the stockade.

They were received with a well-directed volley of arrows and assagais, which did considerable damage.

An obstinate and bloody fight followed, carried on for the most part through loop holes and the interstices between the posts of the stockade.

Monka had been warned of the approach of the expedition, and had his warriors all assembled and ready for the attack.

But Tom's men stood up to their work bravely, and he and his party had forced their way through the stockade into the village, when Umva was killed, and the Batan warriors fled in spite of all Abdallah could do.

Then Monka fell on Tom's party with his whole force and beat them back by sheer force of numbers.

Tom's men, however, showed such a bold front that they were not pursued outside of the stockade, and they fell back in good order.

Tom had scarcely reached the shelter of the woods when one of the sailors, who had been left on guard at the encampment, came staggering up severely wounded.

"The camp had been captured by a band of white men and negroes, and they've carried off the young ladies!"

CHAPTER XX.

SUCCESS OF THE VILLAINS—A NOVEL BATTERING RAM.

Before the sailor could give any further particulars of the capture of the encampment, he fainted from loss of blood, and Dr. Clark proceeded to bind up his wound and endeavor to revive him.

The intelligence that Marie de Castlemain and Louise Ashton were in the hands of an enemy fell on Tom and Mike like a thunder-clap.

But they at once set to work to collect their somewhat scattered forces, intending to march to the rescue without a moment's delay.

While thus engaged they caught sight of a considerable body of men, some of whom were mounted and the rest on foot, hurrying across the plain toward the village.

Tom and Mike's glasses were at their eyes in an instant, and among the mounted men they saw Ortega with Marie in his arms, and Saul Harris, who bore Louise before him.

This sight made Tom and Mike nearly frantic, but Ortega and his party were already so near the village that it was impossible to overtake him before he could reach it.

"We'll have them out of there," said Tom, grinding his teeth, "if we have to tear the stockade down with our teeth!"

"Be jabbers, an' that's me hand ivery time," assented Mike.

In a few minutes more Ortega and his men reached the village, the gates of which were thrown open to admit them, and closed as soon as they entered.

The two boys started to confer with Dr. Clark, when they met Abdallah, supported on either side by two of the Batan warriors, while others carried branches of trees over him.

"Halloo, Abdallah!" said Tom. "Are you hurt?"

"No, sir," replied Abdallah; "they are teaching me to be king."

"Well, this is no time for such fooling."

Abdallah dismissed his attendants and said:

"It is the custom of the Batans, and I thought it best to humor them. Umvo is dead, and they are going to make me their king."

"You were right, then. I was wrong to speak as I did. Get your men together; we have some hot work before us."

It may as well be stated here that the selection of Abdallah to succeed Umvo, made by the warriors, was cheerfully endorsed by the Batan tribe.

It was now so late in the afternoon that Tom, after consulting with Doctor Clark, ordered the men to march back to camp.

They found on reaching it that much less damage had been done than they expected.

Ortega's capture of the encampment was in a great measure the result of accident.

After being defeated in his attempt to capture the ship, he had started back to King Monka's tribe, but being without transportation, and forced to rely on hunting for food, Doctor Clark's expedition, marching by another route, got ahead of him.

On nearing Monka's village, Ortega discovered the encampment, overpowered the small guard, seized the two girls, the horses, and such things as came readiest to hand, then hurried off, carefully avoiding the main body of the expedition, and reached the village in safety.

By the time that things were straightened up at the encampment, and the wounded cared for, it was night.

Guards were posted, supper eaten, and Dr. Clark, Tom, Mike, Henri de Castlemain and Abdallah held a council of war to determine what was best to be done.

In the first place, it was decided not to attack the village

until morning, for Monka, elated by his successful defense and the arrival of reinforcements, would not be likely to abandon the place during the night.

After various plans for battering down one of the gates or a part of the stockade of the village were discussed, Tom said:

"I think I can manage it, but Bravo will have to be sacrificed."

Tom then explained what he intended to do, which met with the hearty approbation of everyone present, and he at once commenced to put his plan into execution.

With the assistance of the trained elephants and their keepers, the immense elephant Bravo was secured so that he could be loaded safely.

Then his head and sides were covered with thick hides, so as to protect him as far as possible from the bullets; a number of large bags filled with stones were strapped to his back; a bunch of squibs and inflammable substances was tied to his tail; he was blindfolded, and his ears plastered up with mud, so that the sound of shouts or firearms would not turn him from his course.

The elephant thus equipped was then led into the entrance of the line of stockades, which extended from the front gate of the village, and hobbled; being unable to see or hear, he remained perfectly motionless.

A greater part of the night was consumed in fixing the elephant; as soon as he was ready, the men were ordered to move forward quietly under cover of the darkness, and take a position close to the village, so as to be ready to attack at daylight.

For an hour or so everything was still as death, and the darkness was intense; then the pale gray light of morning began to render objects visible.

Tom ordered the ropes confining the elephant to be cut, and ignited the inflammable substances attached to his tail.

The fireworks soon began to burn. Bravo, uttering a shrill scream of rage and terror, with tail and trunk erect, charged up the lane like a thunderbolt.

And ere the enemy could discharge more than a few harmless shots, the huge animal, with his momentum increased by the load he carried, struck the gate, shivered it to atoms, and rushed into the village.

The shock when he struck the gate burst apart the bags holding the rocks, and a fragment of the splintered timber tore the bandage off Bravo's eyes.

But he was so badly frightened and enraged by the burns and the hurts which he received in breaking through the gate that he charged straight ahead, overturning huts and slaying men with his trunk, or trampling them to death under his feet.

Most of Ortega's men and Monka's warriors were asleep when Bravo burst into the village.

Most of them escaped out of the back gate and up the mountainside, but a large number scaled the stockade, only to be shot down or speared by Tom's men, who, seeing how things were going on inside, prudently stayed out of the village.

In an incredibly short space of time Bravo killed or disabled upwards of thirty men, put the rest of the defenders of the village to flight, and had complete possession of the place, which for the time being he held against both friend and foe.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOM PRODUCES A VOLCANIC ERUPTION.

Strange to say, Bravo had only received a few insignificant wounds, which readily healed, and he finally became docile.

As soon as he entered the village, Tom had a careful search made among the ruins for Marie and Louise, but no trace of them was found, and it was afterwards ascertained that they were sent up on the mountain the night before.

When the search was completed Tom and Mike, accompanied by a number of the men, went out of the back gate of the village to see if it was at all practicable to fight their way up the mountain.

Bullets soon began to whistle around them so thickly that they retired, but not before they had satisfied themselves that it was impossible to ascend the narrow and precipitous pathway in the face of a hostile force.

Leaving Abdallah with his men to guard the village, Tom, Dr. Clark, Mike and Henri de Castlemain, walked along the base of the mountain to try and discover some other route to the top.

But the search was vain; they were everywhere confronted by frowning precipices which could not be surmounted save by winged creatures.

"Suppose we go over and ascend the volcano," said Tom; "we can then take a bird's-eye view of the mountain, and may discover some pathway which has escaped our observation."

"I am certain that you will not find any practicable route," replied Henri de Castlemain; "but we can get a view of the plateau on the mountain, and see what is going on up there."

"Then let us go, by all means," said Dr. Clark. "I want to examine the volcano, anyway."

Crossing the stream in one of a number of canoes which were drawn up on the bank, they ascended with considerable difficulty the rough, fissured side of the volcano; before reaching the top a good view of the plateau on the mountain was obtained.

Every glass was immediately directed toward it; a large number of people were gathered together near the huts, and they seemed to be holding a palaver; none of the prisoners were visible.

After a few minutes' observation Tom and his companions resumed their ascent and soon reached the top of the volcano.

The sight that greeted their eyes was grand and awful.

Before them was the crater of the volcano, of a circular shape, almost a mile in diameter, filled nearly to the brim with molten lava, in a state of violent ebullition, its flaming billows tossing to and fro like the waves of a stormy sea.

After the first feeling of wonder had subsided Dr. Clark said:

"It is dangerous to remain here; there may be an eruption at any moment."

After withdrawing from their dangerous position, the party once more turned their attention to the plateau on the mountain.

The palaver was over and the savages were erecting a number of posts on the edge of the rock that overlooked the plain.

"Oh, my poor brother!" exclaimed Henri de Castlemain, deeply moved.

"What is the matter?" asked Dr. Clark.

"The savages are preparing to burn their prisoners."

"My God! Then they are lost. Tom, can't you think of some way to rescue them?"

"I was just thinking of a plan that may succeed."

"What is it?"

"We have, fortunately, plenty of powder. I propose to put a hundred pounds or so of it into one of those deep holes in the outside of the crater and fire it after dark with a slow-match. The explosion will blow out a part of the rim and let the lava escape, thus causing an artificial eruption, during which we will make a desperate attempt to storm the plateau."

"Bravo!" said the doctor, leading the way down the volcano; "let us make our preparations at once."

When they reached the village they saw the savages tying

their captives to the posts, which, being on the edge of the plateau, were plainly visible from the plain.

The powder brought with the expedition was in fifty-pound bags; six of these Tom had conveyed up the volcano and placed in a deep hole, which penetrated almost horizontally into the rim of the crater, some hundred feet from the crest.

To guard against accidents, three fuse-ropes, of sufficient length to burn thirty minutes, were then inserted in the powder and extended to the entrance of the hole, which was then filled with fragments of old lava, to increase the force of the explosion.

Leaving Ben Spears, the boatswain, and another reliable man to fire the mine when they received a signal agreed upon, Tom returned to the village.

He ordered a large camp-kettle to be filled with grease and placed on the fire and dissolved in it all of the phosphorus that Dr. Clark had in his medicine chest; the kettle and its contents, closely covered, were then set aside for use.

After carefully inspecting the men's arms and having them well supplied with ammunition, there was nothing else to do, and Tom waited impatiently for night.

At nine o'clock Tom had his men smeared over with the grease in which the phosphorus was mixed, omitting their faces only; this gave them a ghastly, luminous appearance that enabled them to distinguish each other in the dark, and was well calculated to terrify their enemies.

As soon as this operation was completed Tom ordered three guns to be discharged as a signal to Spears to fire the mine.

At the expiration of twenty minutes Spears and his companion arrived, breathless with haste and reported that they had lit the fuse-ropes.

Ten minutes passed and then there was a dull, rumbling explosion, which made the earth tremble.

The side of the crater opened and the molten lava leaped forth and rushed, roaring, down the side of the volcano, a perfect Niagara of liquid fire.

Earth and sky were lit up with a blood-red glare; the fiery torrent, bearing upon its bosom huge rocks, swept onward, consuming the dense forest in its path as if it were stubble, and plunged into the stream which hissed and boiled and sent up dense clouds of steam.

For a brief space of time the two great elements, fire and water, fought for the mastery, but the flow of lava was so great that it quickly filled the bed of the stream with a barrier against which the hissing waves surged in vain, and pushed forward until it dashed in fiery billows against the base of the mountain.

For a short time every one was spellbound by the grand and awful spectacle! Then there arose shrill cries and lamentations from Monka's tribe on the plateau, who thought that the world was coming to an end, and they were about to be destroyed.

This recalled Tom to himself, and with a voice distinctly audible, as though the air had been deathly still instead of filled with the wildest uproar, he cried:

"Forward, men, to victory or death!"

CHAPTER XXII.

VICTORY.

Led by Tom and Mike, the men rushed out of the stockade like demons emerging from the earth, and charged up the precipitous pathway.

Monka's warriors, who were posted at different points of vantage along the path to oppose an attempt to ascend, thinking that they saw a host of fiery devils, fled with feet winged by fear.

Close after them pressed the assailants, hoping to capture them before they reached the plateau, or at least enter it with them pell-mell.

But in this the pursuers were disappointed, for they were confronted at the top of the pathway by Ortega and his men.

Though Tom's men now found themselves opposed by a superior force, they did not hesitate a moment, but with a shout which drowned even the roar of the volcano, they hurled themselves on the foe.

The combat was of unexampled desperation; both sides fought as only brave men will fight when they know that they must conquer or die.

One by one the pirates fell or were driven back, fighting, and Tom and Ortega met on the verge of the precipice, and for the first time during the fight crossed swords with each other.

On the rocky battlement, in the lurid glare of the volcanoes, with the sulphurous exhalations from the lava rising around them, they fought with the fury of men whose bosoms pant only for revenge.

The combat was brief, for they were both so exasperated that they were more eager to strike than to guard. Ortega, in making a desperate stroke, over-reached himself and before he could recover himself Tom's sword pierced his heart.

The thrust was given with such force that the weapon did not stop until the guard struck against Ortega's breast, and when the blade was withdrawn he staggered back, fell over the edge of the precipice and shot down, cleaving the air like a bird, in his headlong descent, till he struck in the molten lava and disappeared forever.

By this time the rest of the pirates were dispatched, and Tom and Mike hurried off toward the captives, who had all this time remained tied to the posts, in a most deplorable state of mind.

As Tom and Mike approached the spot where they were, a man with a lighted torch in his hand emerged from one of the huts and moved rapidly toward the captives.

The two boys darted forward and Mike, who was a little in advance, overtook the miscreant, seized him by the throat and dashed him to the ground just as he was about to thrust the torch into the combustibles piled around Louise Ashton.

Mike's sword flashed from its scabbard, and he planted his foot on the villain's breast the instant he touched the ground. It was Saul Harris, who, true to his cowardly and vindictive character, had skulked in the huts during the fight, and when the sound of the conflict ceased, stole forth to put the helpless prisoners to death.

Ben Spears, who came up at that moment, was directed to take charge of the trembling wretch, bind him hand and foot and guard him carefully.

Tom and Mike at once released the prisoners and assured them of their safety.

Their frantic joy at being saved from the cruel death which stared them in the face and the rapture with which the Count de Castlemain and his wife embraced each other and the two girls, were very affecting.

Tom, Mike and the sailors were so overwhelmed with thanks and praise that the gallant fellows were seriously embarrassed.

A messenger was dispatched for Dr. Clark and Henri de Castlemain, who had remained at the foot of the mountain with a few men to cover their retreat if the assault failed.

They soon made their appearance, and in an instant the Count de Castlemain and his long-lost brother were locked in each other's arms.

Abdallah, who, with his men, had hunted down and slain the last of the Banoga warriors, now came up and conducted the party to the house of the late King Monka; here the Castlemains were left and every one else set about caring for the wounded.

As soon as they were collected and their wounds dressed, steps were taken to dispose of the dead.

The bodies of their friends, who had fallen, were conveyed to a remote portion of the plateau and buried; but the corpses of the enemy were dragged to the edge of the precipice and pitched over into the molten lava, which instantly consumed them.

Many hands made light work, but the number of the slain was so great that it was near morning before the tired men stretched themselves on the ground for a few hours of well-earned repose.

Soon after sunrise every one was astir; summons were sent to the Batan tribe to inform them of what had happened, and Abdallah assured the women and children captured on the plateau that they should not be harmed but taken into his tribe.

He then requested everybody to accompany him to the small lake, of which Henri de Castlemain spoke when telling of his stay with Monka.

The lake had been created by building a dam across the lower end of a hollow, and thus collecting and confining the waters of several springs which gushed forth among the rocks.

By Abdallah's orders a part of the dam was broken down, the water poured over the edge of the plateau and the bed of the lake was soon left bare.

Near its centre was a huge boulder, which on being moved disclosed a cavity in which there was a stone coffer that six men could barely lift and bring out on level ground.

When its lid was removed the contents of the coffer dazzled the eyes of the beholders. It was filled with bars and wedges of virgin gold, precious stones in their rough state, or rudely polished, and many barbaric ornaments set with sparkling gems.

Abdallah had found the treasure of which he spoke in India, and right royally did he redeem his promise to make Tom and Mike wealthy; in fact, they both cried, "Enough!" long before he ceased laying out what he designed for them.

Nor did his generosity stop here; he forced some handsome gems on Dr. Clark, the Castlemains and Louise Ashton, and gave a handsome gratuity to each of the sailors.

He also made a contract with Dr. Clark, by which the latter agreed to return to India at once with the Falcon and bring over a load of Seedeas and a supply of agricultural implements.

In consequence of this contract it became desirable to leave the elephants and horses at Abdallah's village; so Dr. Clark, on finding that the stream dammed up by the lava had commenced to flow in the other direction, determined to return to the vessels by water.

There was an abundance of canoes, and the next morning all of the whites embarked, accompanied by Abdallah, with a strong guard of Batan warriors, and were soon gliding down the stream through the depths of the sombre forest.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HORRIBLE FATE OF SAUL HARRIS—HOME AGAIN.

After traveling eight days in the canoes they found a vessel in the middle of the river which proved to be the L'Orient. She was in possession of the pirates, but the expedition captured her after a hard battle, in which a number of the pirates were killed. Then the Count's party took charge of the L'Orient and they proceeded to the coast, which they reached the next day. Saul Harris was placed in a tent on shore, watched over by Tom and Mike.

The count then determined to set sail immediately.

This made Tom and Mike feel very gloomy over the prospect of being separated from the girls.

One day, when the girls and the Count came ashore to see them, they managed to get the Count to one side and let him know of their love for the girls.

The Count did not seem to be at all surprised, and, calling the girls and placing Marie's hand in Tom's, and Louise's in Mike's, he gave them his blessing and then went out of the tent, leaving them alone.

It was the intention of the Count de Castlemain to go to America, to visit his wife's family, which she had not seen since her marriage, and he advised Tom and Mike to cancel their engagement with Dr. Clark and accompany him.

The doctor was very sorry to part with the two boys, but was too generous to refuse their request, and warmly congratulated them on their happy prospects.

The work of putting the ships together went on rapidly, and Abdallah, who was loth to part with his friends, remained to see them off.

Abdallah had brought a handsome present to Captain Parker, and Tom and his friends, wishing to make some return for his liberality, loaded him and his warriors down with presents of arms and other goods from the large supply on the Harpy.

The river continued to rise steadily but slowly, and nearly everything not in actual use on shore was carried on board of the ships.

The large gorilla, about whose capture the reader will no doubt remember, was also still on shore, for Dr. Clark did not wish to confine him in a cage until it was absolutely necessary.

The ferocious animal was secured by a wire cable around his loins, the other end of the cable being looped around a tree so that it would slip up and down on the trunk and allow the gorilla to ascend to the lower limbs at pleasure.

At length the ships were in a state of readiness for sea, and the men, who had been working like beavers, were given a holiday on shore, and plenty of liquor to drink.

By sundown the frolic was over and the men, pretty well worn out by dancing innumerable hornpipes and skylarking, retired to bed.

At ten o'clock every one had gone to their quarters, except the man on guard. As soon as everything was quiet, Saul Harris, who had managed in some way to steal a bottle of rum, presented it to the sailor who was guarding them.

The man was already pretty well primed with liquor, and he devoted himself so assiduously to the bottle that in less than an hour he was stretched on the ground at the entrance of the tent, sound asleep.

Then Saul Harris, whose bonds had been gnawed in two by one of the pirates, crawled to the sailor, and after securing his knife, pistol and the half-emptied bottle from which he drank, eagerly, released his companions.

On being released the pirates held a whispered consultation as to the best means of procuring arms and ammunition, for they knew that if they went off unarmed they would probably be devoured by wild beasts or die a lingering death from starvation.

"Stay where you are," said Saul Harris; "I know where to get arms, and will bring them to you."

"Let me go with you," said one of the crew.

"No; I had best go alone," replied Saul, creeping away in the darkness.

Saul Harris had an object in going alone, which he did not mention to his companions; his whole heart was set on killing Tom Gale. Arms and ammunition he would get, if they came convenient, but first his enemy should die; and in his insane desire for revenge he was careless about the future.

During his confinement Saul had discovered which tent was occupied by Tom and Mike, and toward it he moved cautiously.

He was soon close to the rear of the tent, and paused by the side of a tree to listen.

Nothing stirred, and the silence was so profound that the deep, regular breathing, which indicated that Tom and Mike slept soundly in the tent only a few feet distant, could be distinctly heard.

Saul's revenge was almost within his grasp; all he had to do was to creep to the tent, slip under the side and bury his knife in the heart of his foe.

His breath came thick, and his heart thumped against his ribs, but he did not falter; from constantly brooding over the subject he had made up his mind that he would rather die a thousand deaths than that Tom should escape.

"I'll use the revolver if the knife fails to do the job effectually," he muttered, as crouching low he moved forward with a noiseless step.

The next instant there rang out on the midnight air a cry of agony, so quaverless and shrill that in a moment the whole camp was in an uproar.

Stealthy as Saul Harris was, there was a yet more stealthy animal watching him. On a large limb of the tree under which he paused, not more than eight feet above his head, the huge gorilla lay extended at full length, following his every movement with its keen, fiery eyes.

As long as Saul stood by the tree the gorilla remained motionless, but when he started to move toward the tent the savage animal sprang down upon him and bore him to the ground.

On finding himself in the deadly grasp of the gorilla, Saul uttered the cry which aroused the camp. In a moment lights began to flash about, and half-clad men, with such arms as came readiest to hand, rushed toward Tom's tent, guided by screams of agony, mingled with deep, angry roars.

By the flaring light of the torches the startled throng beheld Saul Harris in the clutches of the infuriated gorilla, which was literally rending him limb from limb.

One arm, which had already been torn from its socket, lay quivering on the ground, and before any one could think, much less do anything, the powerful animal actually wrenched off the head of the miserable Saul, and hurled it into the midst of the horrified spectators.

"Fire! for God's sake, fire!" cried Dr. Clark.

A rattling volley followed his words, and the savage brute fell dead upon the body of its terribly mutilated victim.

Soon as an alarm was given the pirates made a rush for their liberty, but were intercepted by the sentinels around the camp, and all of them captured.

To guard against any future attempt to escape, they were taken on board of the Harpy and heavily ironed.

The next morning the remains of Saul Harris were buried.

Shortly afterward the lookout reported that the waters of the river had begun to creep over the bar.

A scene of bustling activity followed, the tents were struck, and everything conveyed to the ships.

Then Tom, Mike and the rest parted with Abdallah and went on board.

Tom and Mike went with the Count and his family on the L'Orient, Doctor Clark returned to the Falcon with Captain Parker, and the first mate of the latter vessel had charge of the Harpy with enough men to navigate her.

At length the pent-up waters of the river burst through the sandy barrier and rushed like an immense torrent into the sea.

Anchors were weighed and the vessel, under just enough sail to make them answer their helms, went out with the flood.

As they did so Tom and Mike waved a last adieu to Abdallah, who remained standing on the shore, surrounded by his warriors.

Six days afterward they came safely to anchor at Cape Town.

At Cape Town the pirates were handed over to the authorities and subsequently executed.

The Harpy was condemned as a piratical vessel captured on the high seas, and ordered to be sold for the benefit of her captors. Tom, Mike and Dr. Clark relinquished their share of the prize money to Captain Parker and the crew of the Falcon.

Tom and Mike parted with their friends, Doctor Clark and Captain Parker, at Cape Town.

Doctor Clark, after complying with his contract with Abdallah, penetrated into the interior of Africa, then returned to the United States, abandoned his wandering life and devoted himself to writing an account of his travels.

Captain Parker purchased the Falcon, and with Ben Spears, her former boatswain, for his first mate, is now doing a good business in the India trade.

But to resume the regular thread of my narrative: The Falcon and L'Orient left Cape Town at the same time, the former bound for Calcutta, and the latter for America.

After a pleasant but uneventful voyage the L'Orient reached New York.

Every one was glad to get ashore once more, and Tom and Mike, after escorting the Count de Castlemain's party to a hotel, hurried to their respective homes.

They were received as if they had come back from the grave, for Mr. Augustus Mortimer, Tom's uncle, and Mike's father, after expending large sums in advertising and hiring detectives, without getting any clew to the whereabouts of the boys, had come to the conclusion that they were dead.

After Tom had given his uncle an account of his adventures, and told of Saul Harris' horrible death, Mr. Mortimer, who was deeply affected by the recital, said:

"Though you would have been justifiable in killing Saul Harris, I am glad that his blood is not on your hands, and richly as he deserted hanging I would have been sorry to have my sister's son perish on the gallows."

"It is singular," said Tom, "that Saul should have turned out so badly."

"He inherited the disposition of his father, Calvert Harris," replied Mr. Mortimer, "who was one of the worst men that ever lived; he broke his wife's heart and afterward deliberately took his own life, for the purpose of having me punished as his murderer."

It was late at night before Tom and his uncle got through talking of the past and laying plans for the future.

Mr. Mortimer was delighted at Tom's proposed marriage; he called on the Count de Castlemain and his family next morning with Tom, and found Mike and his family with them.

The Count was very much pleased with Mr. Mortimer, and with Mr. Malone, Mike's father, who was a fine old Irish gentleman, with good blood in his veins, and the owner of a handsome property.

The Count intended to have the marriages take place at his castle in Normandy, but it was not convenient for Mr. Mortimer and Mr. Malone to go abroad at the time, and they persuaded him to let the young couples be wedded in New York.

Tom and Mike spent most of their time with Marie and Louise, and accompanied them to Baltimore where they went with the Count and his wife to see her relatives.

After a stay of three weeks in Baltimore the party returned to New York; the trousseaux of the girls were ready, and the day which was to make Tom and Mike benedicts arrived.

They were married in church and had a reception at Mr. Mortimer's.

After receiving the congratulations of their friends they were driven to the Battery, embarked with the Count and his family on the L'Orient, and were soon gliding down the bay, bound for the sunny land of France.

Though our boys have once more gone abroad, it is only to spend their honeymoon, and then they will return to the land of their birth with their wives.

[THE END.]

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